DWARF WARFARE

CHRIS PRAMAS

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Chris Pramas is an award-winning game designer, writer, and publisher. He is best known as the designer of the *Fantasy AGE* RPG, the *Dragon Age* RPG, and *Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay*, 2nd Edition, and as the founder and President of Green Ronin Publishing. He has been a creative director at Wizards of the Coast and Flying Lab Software and a lead writer at Vigil Games. Most recently he worked with Wil Wheaton on the *Titansgrave* web series from Geek & Sundry. Green Ronin continues to thrive under his leadership, publishing roleplaying games like *Mutants & Masterminds*, *DC Adventures*, and *A Song of Ice and Fire Roleplaying*.

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This electronic edition published 2015 by Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

First published in Great Britain in 2015 by Osprey Publishing,
PO Box 883, Oxford, OX1 9PL, UK
PO Box 3985, New York, NY 10185-3985, USA
E-mail: info@ospreypublishing.com
Osprey Publishing, part of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc
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A CIP catalog record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN (print): 978-1-4728-1053-3
ISBN (ePub): 978-1-4728-1055-7
ISBN (ePDF): 978-1-4728-1054-0

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INTRODUCTION

Humanity has been telling stories about dwarves for thousands of years. You'll find them in Norse and Germanic mythology and even in the earliest stories you'll recognize traits that have carried through to today. Dwarves have long been associated with crafting, mining, and mountains. In mythology they often have magical powers. Curiously, in fantasy dwarves are often portrayed as resistant to magic, but this is at odds with their origin. In Norse mythology the dwarves crafted many famous magical artifacts. The Sons of Ivaldi made Gungnir, the spear of Odin, and the goddess Sif's golden hair. The brothers Eitri and Brokkr crafted the golden ring Draupnir and one of the most recognizable magic weapons in the world, Thor's hammer Mjölnir.

The origin of today's fantasy dwarves is closer to hand. It was J.R.R. Tolkien who took the dwarves of the mythology he loved so deeply and transformed them into one of the core races of his Middle Earth. Tolkien, of course, looms large over the fantasy genre and his vision of dwarves has been an enormous influence. In *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, we see many traits that have carried through to the dwarves of other imaginary worlds: their love of axes, their fondness for treasure, and their adversarial relationship with dragons to name a few. The movies of those books have carried those ideas to an even larger audience.

Games too have been a great popularizer of the fantasy dwarf. They were a core race in the Dungeons & Dragons roleplaying game and have had an important role in all of the worlds it spawned. From there dwarves spread to innumerable other tabletop and computer RPGs. In these numerous games and worlds, dwarves were often re-interpreted – sometimes radically – but there remained a core to the dwarf identity that has remained remarkably consistent, whether they are steampunk inventors or socialist revolutionaries.

Dwarf Warfare is a sequel to Osprey's *Orc Warfare*, which gives this cornerstone race of fantasy the same treatment. The idea here is to provide a military and cultural analysis of dwarves that draws on the core identity of the dwarves as it has developed in the last 75 years. What are dwarves like? How do they organize their armies? How do they fight? These are the questions *Dwarf Warfare* seeks to answer. You can enjoy this as a work of fantasy in its own right, or apply these ideas to your own roleplaying or miniatures game campaigns. *Dwarf Warfare* is broken down into four chapters.

CHAPTER ONE: THE DWARVES

This chapter introduces the dwarf race. It discusses their origins, gods, and magic, and introduces some of their legendary relics. Chapter One also breaks down the dwarf military machine, dissecting the war host and its component parts. In addition, it discusses the various types of dwarf city-states and those dwarves who choose to live among other races.

CHAPTER TWO: DWARF TROOP TYPES

Dwarves can field a variety of troop types, from the ubiquitous heavy infantry to the rarely seen bear cavalry. This chapter looks at each in turn, discussing its battlefield role and typical arms and equipment. It includes not only dwarf troop types, but those of common allies like gnomes and humans.

CHAPTER THREE: DWARF STRATEGIES AND TACTICS

Dwarves have devoted millennia to the study of strategy and tactics. This chapter provides an overview of typical dwarf tactics, looking at how they have used their strengths and weaknesses to build winning strategies. Field battle, underground warfare, and siege tactics are treated in turn.

CHAPTER FOUR: DWARF VICTORIES

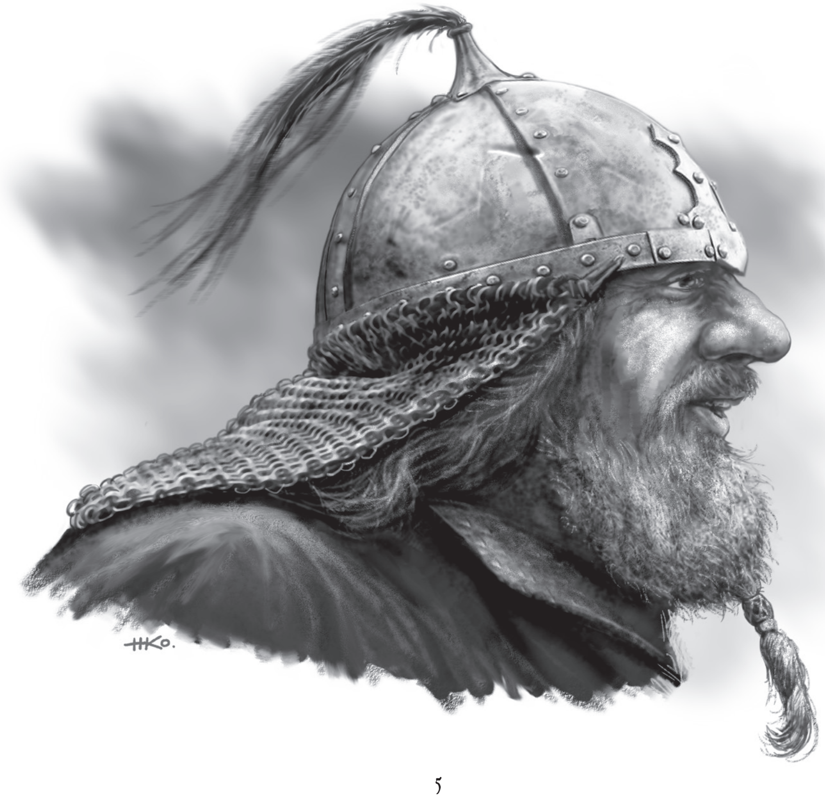
Theory and analysis are all well and good but at some point they must be tried in the heat of battle. This chapter describes five battles in detail, providing concrete examples of how dwarves fight and win. There are three field battles, one underground battle, and one siege. They illustrate the various troop types in action and show off tactics that have brought the dwarves victory.

THE DWARVES

We awoke beneath the mountains, children of the stone. We knew nothing of the world but the Five Ancients were there to guide us. The Artisan taught us how to make weapons and armor, and the Warrior how to use them. The Worker taught us how to build cities, and the Champion how to defend them. And the Seer – the Seer taught us wisdom. We honor them each morning because without the Five Ancients, the dwarf race would not have survived the trials in store for it.

Asmund, Dwarf Priestess

Dwarves are a storied race whose valor and toughness are legendary. They live on many worlds, usually in great city-states under the mountains. They are master craftsmen, cunning merchants, and doughty warriors. They are also proud and their refusal to bend the knee to outsiders has often led to war. Dwarves do not undertake military campaigns lightly but once committed they see them through. They have a drive to excel, and this makes them formidable opponents.



Physically, dwarves are short, generally standing four and a half to five feet tall. They are broader and stouter than humans and elves, however. They also have an impressive stamina, which allows them to work, march, or fight long after other races would be exhausted. Most dwarf men sport beards, and in some cultures beard length is a sign of status. Dwarf women can grow beards and in some cultures they do just that. In others they prefer to be clean-shaven. Other races can find bearded women confusing, which has led to rumors that all dwarves are men. These stories make the dwarves laugh, the bearded women most of all.

If the dwarves have a weakness, it is their low rate of birth. While humans and especially orcs breed and breed, dwarves reproduce much more slowly. Their population growth is often stagnant or regressive. They are long-lived, which helps, but they cannot replace the dead quickly. This can have fateful repercussions for dwarf city-states in times of war. Orcs can lose an entire army and be back with a new one in a few years. When a dwarf war host suffers severe casualties, this can send its city-state into a death spiral it may never recover from. Dwarf generals must always bear this in mind, and it can lead to tactics that other races deem overly cautious.

DWARF ORIGINS

Everything above and below the mountains is ours by right. What the gods have given no mortal can take away.

Halvard, Dwarf King

The dwarves have many myths about their origin, but two dominate. In one version, the gods created the dwarves and left them to gestate under the mountains. The stone kept them safe until the first dwarves awoke deep beneath the earth. In the other version the mountains themselves created the dwarves, making them true children of the stone. In most myths the dwarf pantheon then shepherded the young race in its earliest days, establishing traditions that have endured for millennia. In modern dwarf city-states, worship of the Five Ancients remains the dominant religion. These dwarf gods go by many names, but their titles and roles are remarkably consistent across dwarf cultures.

The Artisan: The god of the crafting, brewing, and inspiration.
The Champion: The god of leadership, strategy, and valor.
The Seer: The god of cunning, commerce, and magic.
The Warrior: The god of war, loyalty, and fellowship.
The Worker: The god of labor, strength, and stone.

The Five Ancients are worshipped together, but some city-states honor certain gods above others. Guild-run cities favor the Seer because of the god's focus on commerce, for example, while monarchies favor the Champion because they see that god as embodying nobility. The genders of the gods also vary from place to place. In some cultures the Warrior is portrayed as a woman and in others as a man, for example. In a few city-states the gods are neither named nor gendered, the Five Ancients being treated more as timeless roles and ideals.

DWARF CITY-STATES

The king has no power any more. He is as much a prop as his costly crown. The guilds know what's best for this city-state and we will lead it into a prosperous future.

Ragna, Guild Leader

Dwarves are an urban people. Their culture is based in large central cities, surrounded by smaller outposts like the spokes on a wheel. Most dwarf cities are underground, typically carved beneath mighty mountains. A few

Dwarves vs. Dragons

Dwarves and dragons have a long history of conflict. Dwarves love to mine precious metals and gems and make them into beautiful treasures, and dragons love to steal them to make their hoards. Some of the most tragic tales of the dwarves revolve around terrifying dragons looting and destroying legendary cities. Many dwarves still yearn to return to these ancient strongholds and make them live again. There is a practical reason that they do not.

In the ancient days dwarves built majestic cities. Although dwarves are a short people, they built mighty front gates into the sides of mountains, and carved out huge, vaulted chambers within. These cities were magnificent to look upon, but aesthetics trumped function with disastrous consequences. The dwarves had built cities that dragons could fit inside and this was a terrible mistake. Their stoutly built gates did not stop the more powerful dragons from getting inside. Their large chambers let the dragons move around the city, burning and eating the populace while gathering up treasure.

After several cities of this kind fell to dragon attack, the dwarves learned their lesson. Architects created new, more practical designs. Now dwarf cities do not have gates and tunnels that dragons can fit through. They are all sized for humanoids. Dwarves are most comfortable, of course, but humans and elves can walk easily. There are still some large and impressive chambers and amphitheaters at the heart of the cities too, but they are beyond the reach of dragons and other oversized monsters. A dragon that can't fit inside a city can't steal its treasure! Dwarves have also developed a specialized unit of monster hunters to deal with large threats like dragons. See Chapter Two for more about them.

are built above ground on hilltops but these cities feel vulnerable to many dwarves. Most find the stone above their heads comforting. The sky is too open, not to mention inviting to aerial predators such as dragons.

There are three dominant ways in which dwarf city-states are organized: noble control, guild control, and worker control. All types maintain a standing army, though its methods of leadership and organization may vary.

Noble Control

A majority of dwarf city-states are organized on a feudal model, with a ruling nobility controlling the middle and working class. The nobility often claims descent from the gods themselves, or the most ancient of ancestors (though the line between those is blurry in many places). Hereditary monarchs are common, though some city-states elect them

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from among a circle of noble families. Since dwarves are a long-lived race, their monarchs may provide decades or even centuries of stability, but this can also lead to complacency and stagnation.

Guild Control

Dwarves in most city-states organize into guilds. Perhaps a third of them are actually controlled by the guilds. This may be direct rule by a guild council or de facto rule with a figurehead monarch. The guilds were originally craft-based, but now most cities have guilds for merchants, soldiers, and sometimes even thieves. Guild-controlled cities are primarily interested in trade. They need markets for all the goods they produce, after all. Rich trading cities are a tempting target to enemies, however, so the guilds always try to maintain a strong defense.

Worker Control

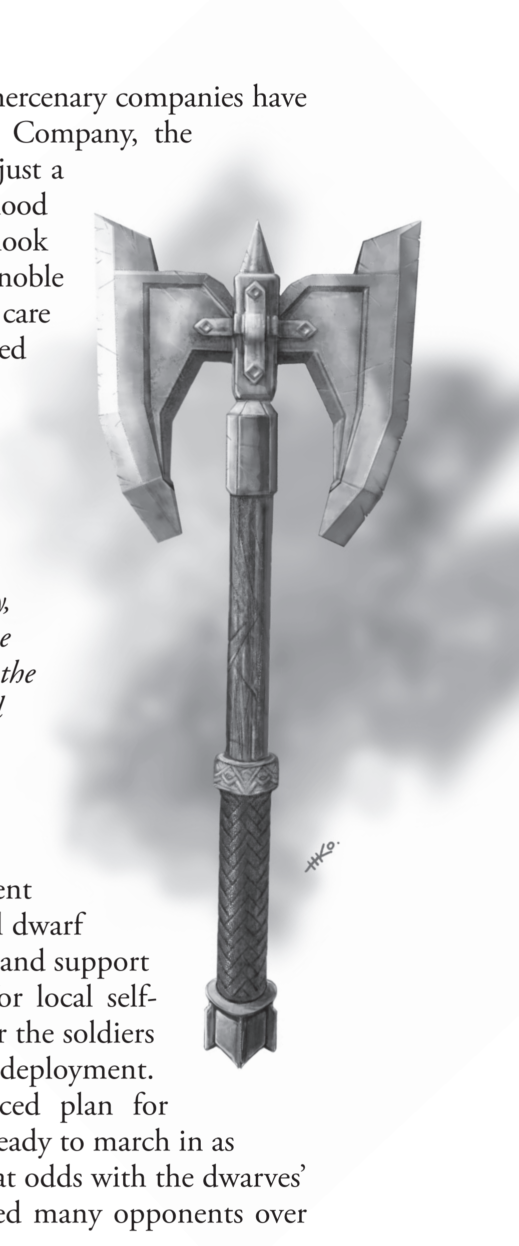
In general dwarf workers are honored as an important part of society. It is their skill that makes the crafts the dwarves are famous for, so even in noble-controlled cities the workers are nothing like human peasants. Dwarves too have their villains, though, and among their kings are some notorious tyrants. Sometimes they are dealt with by a palace coup; other times the guilds take over. In a growing number of city-states, however, the working dwarves have revolted en masse, deposing not just the tyrant but the entire nobility. They replace stodgy feudalism with worker control of the city-state. Representative councils run various facets of day to day life, and the Council of Defense maintains military readiness to fend off counter-revolution and other attacks.

THE DWARVEN DIASPORA

While the majority of dwarves live in their own city-states, a sizable number have chosen or been forced to live among other races. Sometimes a city-state is destroyed and the survivors must make do as best they can. Sometimes dwarves are exiled for political reasons or because they have been convicted of crimes. Often, though, dwarf bands or families simply decide to seek their fortune in the outside world because they feel there is more opportunity there.

Dwarves are most at home among the humans. Most human cities have at least a few dwarves (blacksmiths are typical) and some have entire communities. "Dwarftowns" are common in larger human cities. There the dwarves congregate, live, and do business. Some even establish smaller versions of their own guilds there.

Those dwarves who do not settle down to city life often join mercenary companies or form their own. Well-trained dwarf warriors fetch a high price and full units of them are prized. Several dwarf mercenary companies have become famous in their own right. The Anvil Company, the Whitepeak Raiders, and Laila's Axe Maidens are just a few of the companies that carved their names in blood in the annals of warfare. Some city-state dwarves look down on their mercenary brethren, thinking it ignoble to fight for coin in that way, but the mercenaries care little for such scorn. They consider themselves skilled professionals, artisans of war selling their talents for what they are worth.



DWARF WAR HOSTS

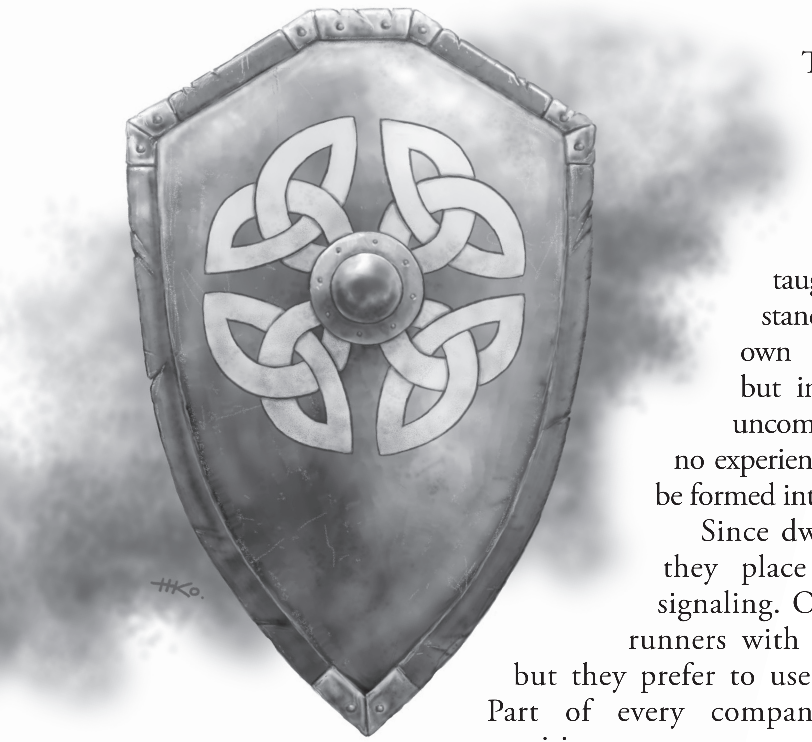
When the war host marched out to meet the enemy, the entire city was on hand to send them off. The cheering was deafening but even so you could hear the thunder of the drums as rank upon rank of mailed warriors sallied forth under the banners of the city. I've never seen such a spectacle.

Calvotore, Human Ambassador

Dwarf armies are known as war hosts. They represent the military might of one or more city-states. All dwarf settlements maintain a standing force of soldiers and support troops. In times of peace they are organized for local self-defense and the keeping of order. In times of war the soldiers muster in their home city-state for large scale deployment. Each city-state has a well-crafted and practiced plan for mobilization. A war host can be assembled and ready to march in as little as two weeks. This organizational agility is at odds with the dwarves' general reputation for slowness and has surprised many opponents over the centuries.

While there is some variation among troop types and between city-states, in general a dwarf war host is organized as follows:

- A war host consists of at least two brigades and is commanded by a general.
- A brigade consists of three to five companies and is commanded by a brigade-captain.
- A company consists of ten sections and is commanded by a captain.
- A section consists of eight to twelve soldiers and is commanded by a sergeant.



The company is the core unit of the dwarf military. Soldiers drill and train with their companies, developing a strong fellowship as the Warrior taught. Brigades may be long standing formations with their own ties between companies, but in times of war it is not uncommon for companies with no experience of working together to be formed into brigades.

Since dwarves are slow moving, they place great importance on signaling. Officers can and do send runners with orders when necessary, but they prefer to use instruments and flags. Part of every company's training is signal recognition, as prompt execution of orders can be of vital importance on the battlefield. Horns and drums are the favored method of issuing orders, as flags can become obscured by terrain and smoke. One section of each company is trained in signaling and every soldier of that section is expected to be able to send and receive messages using all methods.

Officer Corps

Dwarves take the business of war seriously. They have spent millennia studying and debating how to make war, and put these ideas into practice countless times. Every city-state has a Battle Academy where soldiers with leadership potential can train to become officers. Sergeants are generally promoted out of the ranks based on merit, but captains and higher ranked officers are usually products of these schools.

Each Battle Academy has a core faculty of current officers on detached duty and retired officers unable to serve due to age or wounds. These experienced leaders pass on their hard won lessons from the battlefield. The schools also maintain extensive libraries for their students' use. There are hundreds and hundreds of dwarf books on strategy and tactics, and Battle Academies pride themselves on their collections.

In times of peace, a candidate may spend up to five years at a Battle Academy, and then spend another five to ten years serving as second-in-command to a captain before receiving a promotion and taking command of a company. In times of war, this schedule may be accelerated – sometimes drastically. In particularly brutal wars, some candidates have gone from new student to company commander in six months, despite objections from the staff.

Discipline

The city-states maintain full time, professional armies, though workers' militias can supplement them in times of crisis. Discipline in the war hosts is hard, but not cruel. Soldiers are representing their city-states and are expected to act as such. They must follow orders, and in the heat of battle this must be without question. There is not time in the middle of engagement to explain the tactical thinking behind each move. When dwarf soldiers are told to attack, they will attack. When told to retreat, they will retreat.

That said, disciplinary problems are not unknown in war hosts. Dwarves are enthusiastic drinkers and every soldier expects a daily ration of ale. Sometimes – when officers aren't as observant as they should be – dwarves drink several days' ration at once and the typical problems of drunkenness ensue: belligerence, brawling, and defiance of authority. The punishment for drunkenness is usually extra guard duty and the loss of a week's ale ration. Greater infractions include failure to obey an order, falling asleep on guard duty, and assaulting an officer. Punishments range from days or weeks in the gaol to demotion to expulsion from the army or even exile. Execution is reserved for straight up treason. Dwarf commanders are always frugal with the lives of their soldiers, even in disciplinary cases.

Desertion is not a common problem for war hosts. Dwarf soldiers are generally well trained and professional. There is a problem unique to dwarf armies that sometimes causes desertion, though. When a war host is on a long campaign above ground, some dwarves become "sky crazy." Basically, the constant presence of the sky slowly unhinges them. They need the calming presence of the stone above their heads. Sky crazy dwarves desert their units and make for the nearest underground region. Once they've had a chance to calm down, they can often be convinced to rejoin their units. There are stories, however, of sky crazy dwarves who disappear into unknown tunnels and spend years wandering alone.

Dwarf Uniforms

In ancient times dwarf war hosts did not wear uniforms. Soldiers were responsible for their own arms and armor, so the appearance of dwarves even within the same company could vary wildly. As tactics and signaling developed, dwarf officers began to see the value of uniforms. These began simply, with certain colors assigned to different brigades or companies. As long as they appeared on the units' shields or helms, they could be identified fairly easily. This later developed into surcoats. These are coats worn over the armor and bearing the heraldry and colors of the city-state and/or the unit. They match the unit's banners.

While the city-state is usually responsible for outfitting troops in uniforms, sometimes the guilds get involved. They sponsor a unit and pay for their uniforms and banners. In these cases the uniforms include iconography of the supporting guild. Units sponsored by the Blacksmiths Guild may have a hammer and anvil as part of their coats of arms. Those sponsored by the Brewers Guild might have a stein on theirs, and so on. Workers' militia units, which rarely have uniforms due to their status as temporary formations, nonetheless try to represent their professions on their gear. A militia unit made up of miners might paint crude pickaxes onto their shields, for example.

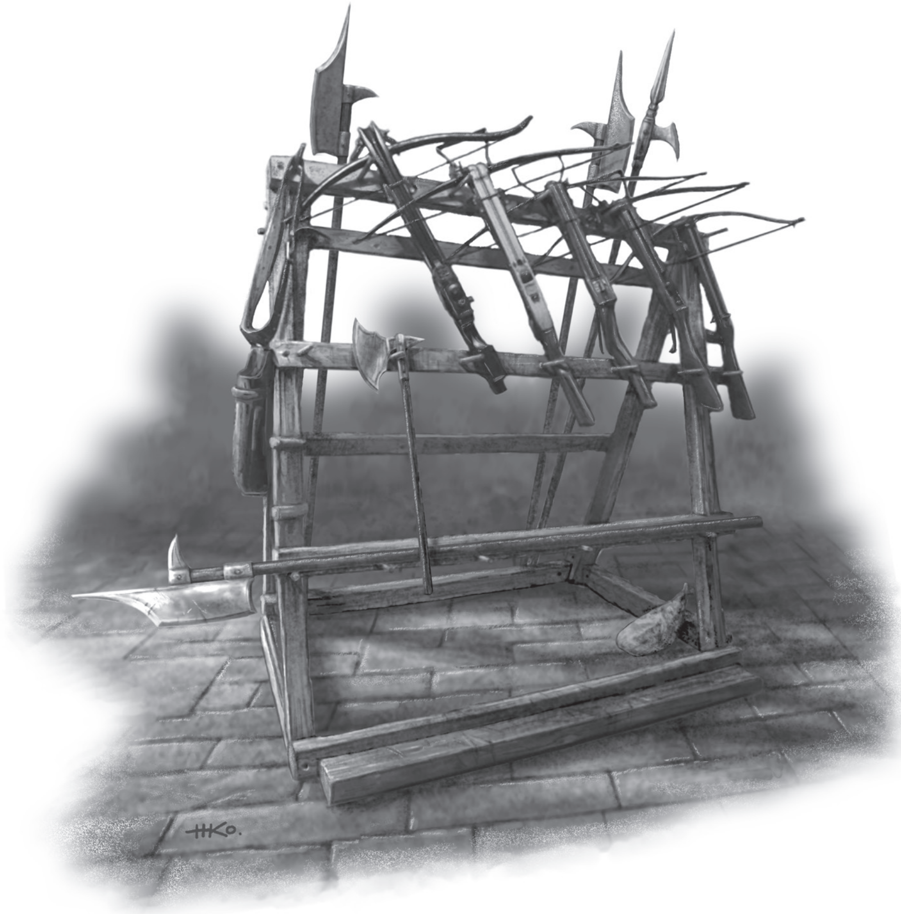
Dwarf Armor and Weapons

No army is as well equipped as a dwarf war host. Not only are dwarves superior craftsmen, but they also have a reverence for the work of their ancestors. This means that masterworks are handed down from generation to generation. It is not uncommon for a captain to use an axe forged by his grandfather, or a sergeant to wear a helmet that's an heirloom of her house. All dwarf weapons are finely crafted and made with quality components. They are also frequently beautiful, with engravings and etchings common on blades and armor plates. Inset gems are popular among the nobility.

Every dwarf city-state is a power house of production. In some there is one powerful Smiths Guild, while in others there are more specialized guilds like Armorers, Weaponsmiths, and Blacksmiths. There are dozens – and in some cities hundreds – of forges in a city-state. The only thing there are more of is pubs (working in a forge being thirsty work!). In times of war the forges work day and night, particularly on heads for crossbow bolts. A war host can go through a huge amount of ammunition in a short time, so re-supply must be assured.

A typical dwarf soldier wears chainmail armor and a steel helmet, and carries a short sword or dirk for close defense. Spears are the most common melee weapons, as they give the dwarves some reach against large opponents and cavalry. Despite that, the weapon most associated with dwarves is the axe. Perhaps this is because dwarves treat spears as useful tools, but have a true passion for axes. This goes back to the earliest days of dwarfkind. The Warrior is usually shown wielding a battle axe and one of his most famous feats is the killing of ten demons with the toss of a single throwing axe.

It is no surprise then that axes in all their forms can be found in abundance in a war host. Single-bladed battle axes and hand axes are most common, as they can be used effectively with a shield. Two-handed axes are also popular, as their killing power cannot be beat. Double-bladed models are preferred for their versatility, though some dwarves swear by an axe blade backed up



with a hammer head. Lastly, there are throwing axes. These can be hurled at short range as the battle lines close, potentially disrupting enemy formations. Some soldiers carry as many as three throwing axes into battle in addition to their other equipment, as it is believed better to have too many axes than not enough. A dwarf who comes close to succeeding at something but fails is said to be "one axe short."

Hammers are also popular melee weapons, which makes sense for a race of craftsmen. When blades can't pierce enemy armor, hammers can break the bones beneath it. As with axes, there are one-handed and two-handed models. The latter are extra useful in sieges and underground fighting, as they can be used to knock down doors and other obstructions. Other melee weapons seen in war hosts include maces, flails, morning stars, broad swords, and two-handed swords.

As for missile weapons, the crossbow is ubiquitous. Only rangers prefer the bow. The crossbow is relatively easy to use, and its mechanical construction appeals to dwarves. They are particularly fond of the repeating crossbow, which now predominates. This clever device has a feeder on top that drops a new bolt into position after the weapon is fired. This allows dwarf crossbowmen to pepper the enemy with bolts and keep up a terrific rate of fire.

Legendary Relics

Relics are the greatest of all dwarf magic items. They were created in ancient times and have storied histories and fabled powers. Most city-states have a handful of relics and they are guarded closely. To lose a relic in battle is unpardonable. Any general responsible for such a debacle would be stripped of command and likely exiled as well. Descriptions of a few of these legendary relics follow.

Barioth's Scales: When the great hero Halli slew the dragon Barioth, he took sections of the beast's hide and scales back to his home city of Skiruna. He hired the best artisans and had them turn his trophies into a full set of dragon scale armor, including a helmet ringed with dragon teeth. Once enchanted the armor had a lightness and flexibility that was unmatched. Further, its wearer became totally immune to dragon fire. Barioth's Scales thus became the ultimate armor of the dwarf dragon hunters, and only the best of the best earn the honor of wearing it.

The Berserking Axe: This two-handed axe is made of a strange dark metal mined from a meteor. It is a beautiful and deadly weapon. In battle the bearer is overcome by a black rage, becoming stronger and tougher but beyond anyone's control. A warrior wielding the Berserking Axe can continue to fight long after wounds should have stopped him. This weapon is only used in dire circumstances, however, for two good reasons. First, the bearer makes little distinction between friend and foe, so must be carefully deployed before the axe's magic takes effect. Second, once the battle is over, the magical fortitude sustaining the bearer dissipates. Most of its most famous wielders have died after using it.

The Earth's Fury: This banner is said to have been enchanted by the Worker himself. Compared to many dwarf banners, its design and ornamentation are simple. Its magic, however, is powerful. When the banner is slammed into the ground, the bearer can send a bolt of geomantic force hurtling forward. This tears up the ground as it travels and can weaken and even splinter stone. It is prized for its effectiveness in sieges. The Earth's Fury can destroy a fortification in a day that would survive weeks of bombardment from stone throwers.

Steelbreaker: A warhammer of cunning design, Steelbreaker brings the fire of the forge to the battlefield. When it hits an opponent wearing metal armor, the hammer's head glows and the armor turns red hot on the point of impact. This alone is quite painful but then the heat begins to spread. Over the next few minutes, the whole suit of armor will burn with the heat of the forge. Those who cannot take their armor off in time die a slow and painful death. Steelbreaker is greatly feared and its mere appearance on a battlefield can unnerve enemy troops.

The Stone's Strength: Two thousand years ago the famed artisan Jubul crafted this pair of rings. They are made from a green stone and carved with complex glyphs that honor the Warrior and the Worker. When only one ring is worn, there is no effect. When both rings are worn – one on each hand – their magic activates. The wearer not only becomes much stronger, but also his hands become as tough as stone. A punch from a warrior with the Stone's Strength can send opponents flying backwards. He can also use his hands to parry weapons without injury, no matter how sharp they are.

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While chainmail is the most common armor used in a dwarf war host, both lighter and heavier types are also used. Dwarves who can afford it wear plate mail or full plate armor in battle. These heavily armored soldiers are found most frequently among the shock troops, but other unit types have plate armored dwarves mixed in their ranks. Rangers favor leather armor, since they must move quickly and stealthily. Quickly mustered troops like workers' militias also make use of leather armor, as there usually aren't enough chainmail hauberks to go around.

Dwarf Magic

Dwarves do not have wizards, sorcerers, or warlocks. Many therefore believe that they have no skill with magic, but this is not at all the case. Dwarves may not cast spells, but they are unparalleled enchanters of magic items. The creation of enchanted armor, weapons, and banners – this is the magic of the dwarves. It is considered to be a gift from the Seer, though the lessons of the Artisan are just as important. You cannot create a magic item without a master-crafted item to begin with and these are the province of the Artisan.

The secret of this magic is the metal vaketill, which the dwarves discovered deep beneath the mountains ages ago. Vaketill, it was found, could be mixed in with other metals during the forging process and so create an item ready for enchantment. Without the use of vaketill, simply preparing an item for enchantment was a long and laborious process that often ended in failure. Creating a magic item thus requires at least two masters of their craft: a smith who knows the secrets of working with vaketill and a priest who can lay enchantments upon a properly prepared item. As this process is neither cheap nor easy, magic items are rare even in dwarf city-states. A war host may have perhaps a dozen across the whole army.

In the main dwarves make three types of magic items for their war hosts: armor, weapons, and banners. Armor and weapons are enchanted to simply be better than their mundane counterparts. Swords and axes are sharper and can more easily cut through armor and flesh. Helmets and armor are tougher and can more easily turn aside blows. Some have additional effects, though these are rarer. There are blades whose touch freezes flesh and armor that makes the wearer immune to fire. There are helms that grant the ability to see great distances and hammers that can demolish a wall in seconds. As for the banners, they too can have a variety of effects. Some use their magic to deflect incoming missiles, while others can shoot bolts of lightning at the enemy. The most common magical banners inspire their units to stand firm in the face of the foe. Dwarves under their effect do not panic, no matter the situation.

DWARF TROOP TYPES

A dwarf war host is an infantry-based army but one with a variety of troop types. Some enemies dismiss the dwarves as nothing but slow moving spearmen but this is a mistake. While some troop types are rarer than others and few war hosts feature them all, a dwarf army brings more to the battlefield than it appears at first glance. This chapter breaks down the various elements of a war host and looks at each in detail.

HEAVY INFANTRY

I told Zorbeg the dwarf phalanx was too strong but the spirit of the Smite-Father was in him and he and his wolf spearman charged in. Zorbeg was the first to die, impaled on three spears. He was not the last.

Argitan, Orc Warlord

Dwarves are so perfect for the heavy infantry role, it is as if they were designed for it. They are stout and have terrific endurance, able to wear heavy armor for long periods without complaint. They are able to march in formation and maintain it in combat encounters that would break other units. Perhaps most importantly, they can fight as a team, not as a collection of individual warriors. For all these reasons and more, dwarf war hosts field more heavy infantry than any other troop type.

As befits their role, they are heavily armored. Full chainmail armor and a large shield are considered a minimum level of protection for heavy infantry. Plate armor is preferred, though not all city-states can afford to equip their soldiers with it. Helmets may be open-faced or fully enclosed, depending on the preference of the unit. Some prefer the protection of the full helm, others the visibility of the open-faced helm. Since dwarves lack the reach of humans and orcs, long spears are the standard weapon, backed up with hand axes or short swords for close in work. Some units carry throwing axes as well, which they toss shortly before contact to disrupt the enemy.

On the battlefield, heavy infantry deploys in a phalanx formation. The dwarves are packed in tight, with each soldier protecting the comrade to his left with his shield, while being protected in turn by his comrade to the right. The spears of the first three ranks are projected forward to create a thicket of sharp points. A properly deployed phalanx is difficult to approach, especially by cavalry. It is also difficult to maneuver, however, and is thus vulnerable to flanking attacks. It also becomes vulnerable in difficult terrain, which can break up the formation. When dwarves fight field battles, they prefer to fight on level ground for this reason.

When fighting underground, heavy infantry is deployed in smaller units. Spears are used when space allows for it, but many tunnels are ill-suited for such long weapons. In these situations, axes, hammers, and swords are preferred. They still fight in tight formation, tunnel walls providing perfect flank protection. Heavy infantry advancing behind linked shields in the dark confines of the underground is formidable indeed.

SHOCK TROOPS

We saw them coming but there was no room to maneuver. We tried to reform to our flank but the line was ragged. Their attack was a hammer blow and in a matter of minutes our storied regiment had all but ceased to exist.

Farrell, The Queen's Own Halberdiers

The spearmen of the heavy infantry are meant to absorb enemy attacks and bog them down in a slogging match. While these stout dwarves can and do win many engagements on their own merits, it is the shock troops whose purpose it is to deliver the heavy blows that will break enemy formations. Shock troopers are heavily armed veterans who specialize in the use of two-handed weapons. They mainly use hammers and double-headed axes, but great swords are not unknown among them. They are also the most heavily armored of all dwarf units. Shock troops wear full plate armor with a fully enclosed helm. Armed and armored thus and with deadly skill with their weapons of choice, shock troops are the toughest part of any war host. When they attack, dwarves expect victory to follow.

Shock troops are deployed in reserve at the start of battle, unless the situation is truly dire. Their numbers are never great, so commanders use them carefully. Only when the battle hangs in the balance do the shock troops go in. When they advance with drums pounding and boots stomping, the whole war host takes heart. The charge of shock troops is not fast, but it is powerful and inexorable. When they reach the enemy battle line, their two-handed weapons deliver powerful blows that few troops can withstand.

If shock troops have a weakness, it is heavy cavalry. The lances of such troops can pierce even plate armor and have such reach that the shock troops can do little but try to weather the attack and then go to work on the mounts to bring the riders down. Some consider the killing of horses to be cruel, but it is effective. Of course, the shock troops must survive the initial charge to have a hope of turning the tide. Some shock troops have developed an

unusual tactic to do just that. They stand as if to receive the charge but when the cavalry is almost upon them, they drop to the ground. If timed correctly, the lances miss and the horses of the front ranks leap over them. Then the shock troopers stand up and lay about them with axe and hammer. Human knights consider this conduct most unfair, but the dwarves don't consider it their duty to stand still to get skewered in the name of sportsmanship.

Since shock troops are the elite warriors of a dwarf war host, their units often have long and colorful histories. Joining a unit with a proud tradition helps instill esprit de corps. Sometimes these units form around a famous leader. Other times they are created to honor dead heroes or institutions. There is an all-female company known as the Sword Sisters who are devotees of the Champion and experts in the use of two-handed swords. Another famous company is the Prince's Own Halberdiers, formed in memory of the late Prince Origar. They earned their name breaking a cavalry charge with skillful use of their halberds (an unusual weapon in a dwarf war host).

CROSSBOWMEN

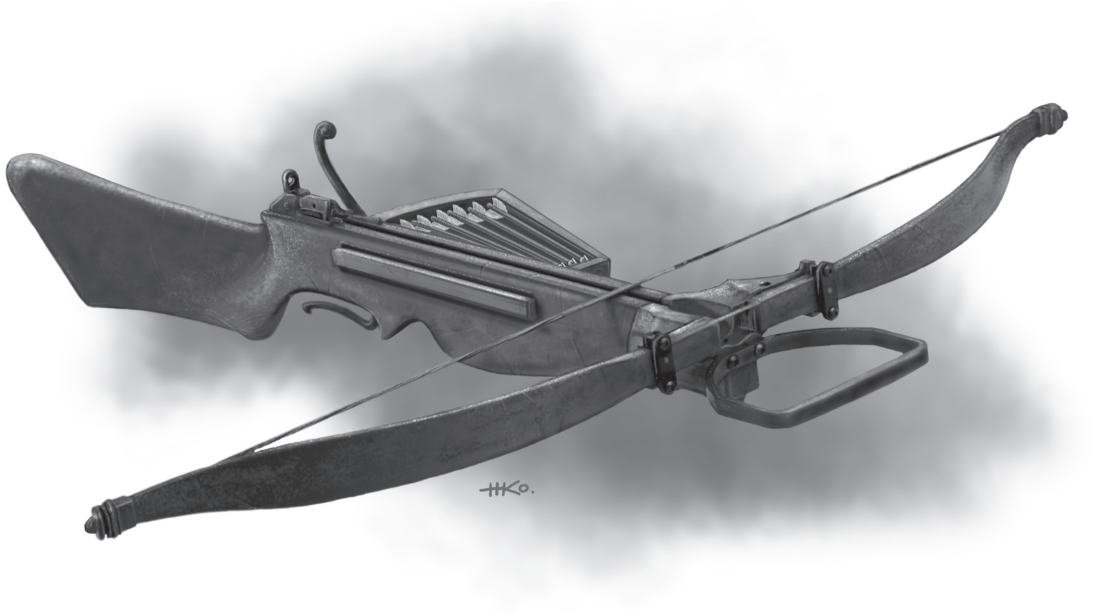
Next target: goblin wolf riders coming up on the right. On my mark…loose!

Gunnel, Dwarf Sergeant

Dwarves are not natural marksmen like elves, but they can provide solid missile support if trained and equipped properly. Nearly every city-state uses the crossbow as its missile weapon of choice. While the rate of fire of the common crossbow is slower than that of the bow, it takes much less training to use a crossbow effectively. Even part-time troops can master the basics quickly. Dwarf crossbows are, of course, exceptionally well made. Many city-states have also developed cunningly crafted repeating crossbows. These weapons combine the crossbow's ease of use with the bow's rate of fire.

In battle dwarf leaders like to deploy crossbowmen in large units to support the melee troops. They favor volley fire for two reasons. First, it means individual marksmanship is less important. Second, well-coordinated volley fire can have a devastating effect on the enemy. Units armed with repeating crossbows can keep up a withering fire as long as their ammunition holds out. Even those armed with normal crossbows can keep up a respectable rate of fire by working in teams. This allows one dwarf to be reloading while the other shoots.

Whereas the missile troops of other races stand little chance if charged, dwarf crossbowmen can hold their own against many opponents. They are armed with short swords for such contingencies. Although there is



obviously little they can do in the face of troops like cavalry or ogres, crossbowmen in desperate melee have held out long enough for reinforcements to turn the tide in many battles. If deployed in good cover or behind mantlets, crossbowmen can hold a position for quite some time.

RANGERS

There is a flanking movement but I only counted one troop of cavalry. I recommend we keep the reserves where they are. This is nothing but a nuisance attack.

Kiale, Dwarf Ranger

Rangers are the most well traveled of all dwarves. During times of peace, they serve as messengers for their city-states. Rangers must be able to navigate above and below ground, and survive alone in dangerous territory. They are also skilled observers, able to relate what they have seen and heard in great detail. These same skills are important in times of war. Then rangers travel to perform reconnaissance missions. It is their job to find the enemy and report their numbers and intentions. Stealth is a necessity, so rangers are also masters of concealment. They know that if they are detected, their odds of outrunning their enemies are slim.

Rangers travel light compared to most of their kin. They favor leather armor and short swords. Unlike most dwarves, they prefer the bow to the crossbow. Rangers are willing to put in the training time to become effective bowmen, and they prize the greater rate of fire they can achieve. While they spend most of their time operating individually or in small teams of two to three rangers, they sometimes assemble into larger groups to ambush isolated enemy units or cause panic behind the lines. In set piece battles, rangers are deployed to warn against flanking maneuvers and cover areas of difficult terrain. They are also used to perform raids or to lead troops to secondary objectives while the main engagement is being fought.

GRENADIERS

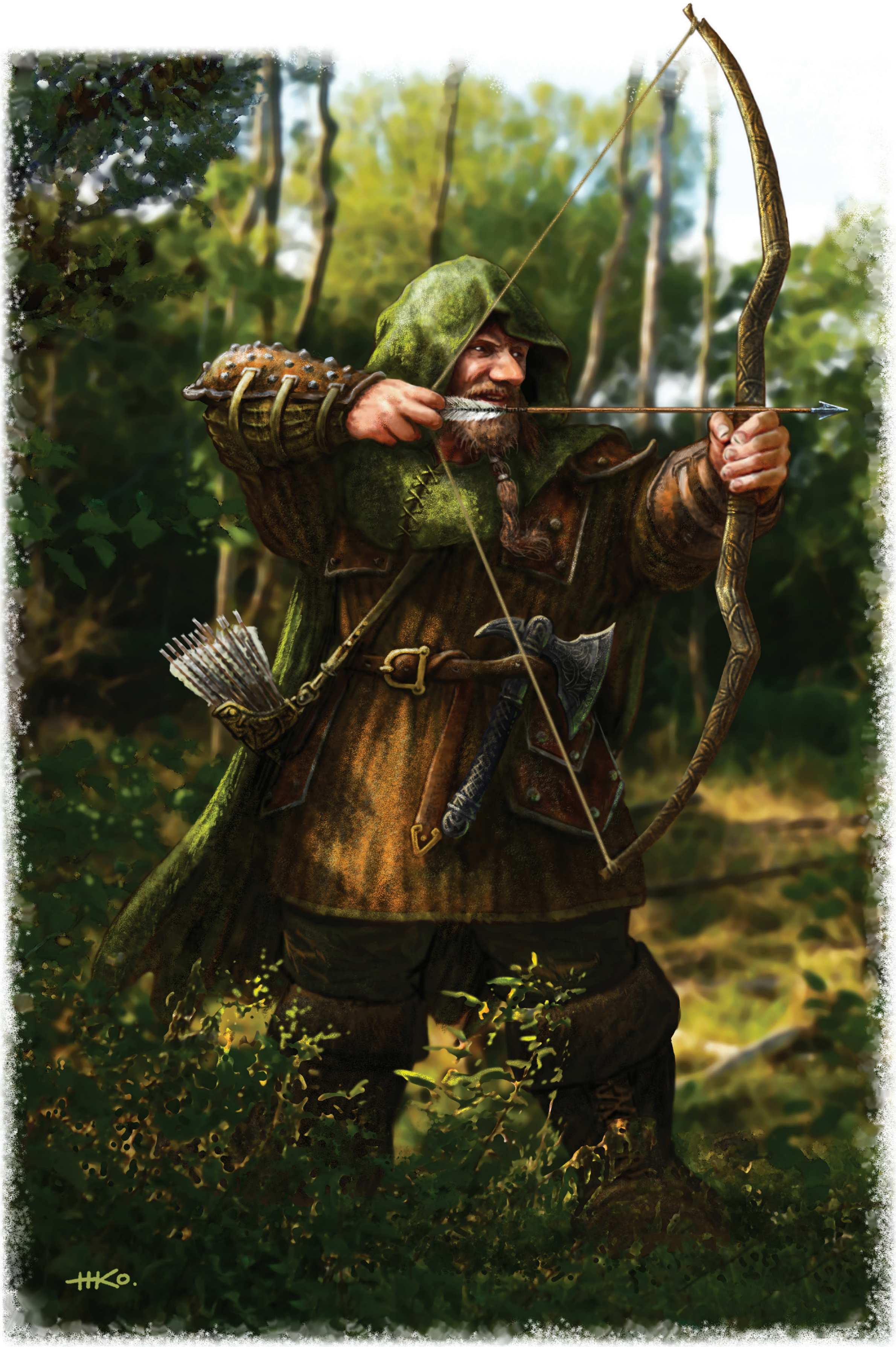
We had just charged home to rout the pint-sized bastards when a blast dismounted me. All around me were screaming, bloody horses and knights face down in the mud. Then the dwarves counter-charged and the fallen men were taking axes to the head.

Grigori, Human Knight

Long ago dwarf miners began to use blasting powder in their work. It could be dangerous to the miners, so it was initially rejected for use in warfare. Dwarves prefer weapons that are reliable and mangled miners did not argue for the safety of blasting powder. When trying to deal with an orc invasion, a group of young engineers decided it was worth the risk and tried to develop various weapons that used blasting powder. There were some costly failures and a number of dead ends, but in the end they developed one weapon that was successful and later spread to other city-states: the grenade.

Dwarf grenades are spherical and often painted with images of dragons breathing fire. Considering the damage an exploding grenade can inflict, it's easy to understand why. The grenades are safe to carry until primed for use. This is done through an ingenious mechanical timer that allows the thrower to set it from two to ten seconds, with a default of five seconds. Grenadiers spend a lot of time training for both accuracy and timing. They must be able to throw a grenade exactly where it needs to go and time it so it explodes before the enemy can throw it back. A typical grenadier carries a satchel with ten grenades.

Dwarf grenadiers are sometimes used as skirmishers, but commanders have found that this makes them vulnerable to light troops. More commonly, they are deployed in the rear of units of heavy infantry. They lob grenades into enemy ranks to break up charges. Once battle is joined, they throw grenades to the rear of the enemy formations to disrupt support of the front line troops, create chaos, and of course blow them to bits. Grenadiers truly come into their own in tunnel fighting, however.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In underground fighting, grenades can quickly clear rooms and intersections and the concussive force has even greater effect in such confined spaces.

WORKERS' MILITIAS

We will never go back to the old ways. Workers, hold your heads and banners high! We are new dwarves for a new millennium!

Eklund, Dwarf Militia Captain

All adult dwarves have at least some training in arms. While many of them join war hosts when battle calls, more remain at their jobs and support the effort that way. Armies need weapons, ammunition, food, and so on, and this must come from somewhere. When the situation is dire, however, city-states call up the workers' militia. They are organized by neighborhood or sometimes sponsored by guilds. Such units are high in enthusiasm, but not as well trained or well disciplined as regular troops. They are not as heavily armed either. Most militia units are equipped with leather armor, spears, and shields. Some may have helms. The older members may be ex-soldiers and they bring useful experience and steadiness, and the occasional mail hauberk into the unit. All militias march under large and impressive banners, competing with each other for the grandest displays of civic pride.

Workers' militias are used to bulk out numbers in a war host. They are usually second line troops, or used to guard baggage trains or on garrison duty. In some of the worker-controlled city-states, however, workers' militias make up the majority of a war host. Professional soldiers are often seen as protectors of the old regime and so they are not completely trusted. The workers' militias are considered politically reliable, even if their fighting abilities are not as high as regular troops. Zeal can be its own weapon, however, and war hosts of workers' militias have won some impressive victories.

SAPPERS

The siege lines are complete. They are bottled up in that castle and they will stay that way until they starve to death or surrender.

Hakaar, Dwarf Sapper

When a war host takes to the field, it always includes a contingent of sappers. They are indispensable to a dwarf force of any size, providing battlefield engineering of all sorts. Their tasks are legion. They clear obstacles that impede the march and can even build bridges when necessary. Since dwarf war hosts move slowly, they make a fortified camp each night. This is centered on the war wagons if present. The sappers organize and oversee the building of the camp, though all soldiers are expected to pitch in.

It is in sieges that sappers truly come into their own. They lay out the siege lines and build emplacements for the war machines. They perform mining operations to undermine walls (or counter-mine if they are in the garrison). Some sappers bring blasting powder on campaign and use it to bring down walls even faster, though this is a dangerous gambit.

Sappers are not front line fighters, but they are capable combatants. They are most likely to get in a scrap during a mining operation, when a mine and counter-mine meet. Then a deadly underground struggle ensues. Since there is little room to swing a weapon in the close confines of such tunnels, sappers prefer short swords and daggers for this work. If they must fight in the open – when a sortie attacks their trench works, for example – they use the tools of their trade like picks and hammers to defend themselves. Since so much of their work requires regular labor, few wear armor, though helmets are ubiquitous. Safety first!

SLINGERS

A rock from a sling hit my helmet and I flew off my horse. That was the end of battle for me. My scalp was bloody and my head rang for hours.

Thestor, Human Mercenary Sergeant

While the crossbow is the ranged weapon most associated with dwarves, there are some war hosts that field units of slingers as well. They come from city-states that herd goats on their mountain slopes, the sling being the preferred weapon of the herder from time immemorial. Some who work as herders in their youths become soldiers and bring that expertise with them. They operate as light infantry, skirmishing ahead of the war host or deploying on its flanks to provide missile support. They usually wear leather armor and carry short swords or hand axes in addition to their slings. Most do not wear helmets, as they feel they can see and hear better without them.

While the forges of the city-states can provide specially cast iron bullets for the slingers, the great thing about the weapon is that it can be used with stones as well. Dwarves, of course, are rarely far from rocks and stone, so maintaining an ammunition supply for the slingers is usually not a problem. Both bullets and stones do their damage from impact. They do not need to penetrate the enemy's armor to hurt them. An impact from a sling bullet or stone can break bones and cause terrible internal bleeding.

Slingers do require a certain amount of space to use their weapons, and this is a disadvantage when combat is underground. They are thus usually deployed in above ground fighting. Since they learned the mountain pathways intimately while herders, slingers can also serve as scouts in local campaigns. They are quite adept at setting up ambushes in rough terrain. Slingers often work with rangers, as they share a similar skillset. Moreover, it is not uncommon for rangers to recruit from their ranks.

MONSTER HUNTERS

I hit that big bastard with a bolt from the arbalest and it didn't even slow him down. The grenade I shoved in his mouth – that he noticed!

Pirkko, Dwarf Monster Hunter

There are many large threats that dwarves must face in battle: ogres, trolls, giants, and dragons to name but a few. Fighting them takes specialized knowledge, equipment, and tactics, and that is where the monster hunters come in. They are small units of dwarves who specialize in fighting large creatures. They train to deal with all sorts of enemies, using their own

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experiences and centuries of dwarven tactical lore to hone their techniques. They are small in number. A war host would be lucky to have 50 monster hunters in its ranks. While they can and do fight together, they can also be parceled out to other units to provide on the spot advice and encouragement when they face looming threats.

Since the equipment needed to fight various creatures differs quite a bit, monster hunters bring a virtual armory with them in their own specially designed war wagons. Each warrior has leather, chain, and plate armor and can wear what's most appropriate on a given day. They also have many weapons to choose from. Long spears, two-handed axes and hammers, and long swords are available in abundance. The wagons also have arbalests mounted on them. These are extra heavy crossbows usually used in sieges. The monster hunters find them useful against their oversized foes, and can detach them from the war wagons if needed. They use grenades as well, and they have invented a novel way to deliver them to an enemy's weak spot. The monster hunters have long poles that grenades can be tied on the end of. They can then approach a monster and jam the grenade right where it will do the most damage.

Monster hunters are inveterate trophy collectors. After a battle, they will take heads, scales, horns, teeth, and other choice bits from the monsters they have killed. They use these trophies to decorate their war wagons and themselves. A unit of monster hunters looks like nothing else on the battlefield. Some members wear horned helmets, while others have necklaces of monster teeth around their necks. Shields may be covered with scales or made from monster hide. They often mount the huge skulls of their kills above their war wagons too, as an illustration of their conquests and a warning to other beasts.

BEAR CAVALRY

Before battle we only give the bears a small meal. We want 'em hungry when the blood starts to flow.

Stepan, Bear Rider

The name of the mad dwarf who first tried to ride a bear is not recorded. Certainly, the search for a mount suited for the dwarf physique was a long one. While they sometimes use ponies for transport and baggage, there are no dwarf pony brigades trotting into battle. The ferocity of bears – that, a small number of city-states have been able to harness. Such units are perforce small. It is difficult to find, capture, and train bears for combat. The resources and effort required are considerable and there is always a chance that even the most well-trained bear will go out of control during

battle. Still, those city-states with bear cavalry are certain that it is all worth it. It gives their war hosts a game changing shock troop.

Since even a fully armored dwarf is a small burden for an adult bear, the riders wear heavy plate with shields slung around their necks. They need both hands for their long spears. These are not lances, as bears cannot really replicate a horse's charge. The shock of impact is provided by the bears themselves, and then the riders use their long spears to stab downwards from their perch instead. Due to the way the bears fight and the weapons the riders use, the formation of bear cavalry is not tight – not stirrup to stirrup like heavy horse cavalry. Each bear becomes something of a maelstrom once battle is joined, so the dwarves have learned to give them space. Some city-states make them even more formidable by giving the bears armor as well. This special barding is usually made of scale mail. It slows them down a bit but protects the bears from many attacks.

Their small numbers can make a big impact. Most opponents are not ready for a dozen bears to smash into their battle line, so few have tactics ready to counter them. It is possible for a phalanx to fend off bear cavalry, but this requires the troops in the front ranks to remain steady. When faced with a charging bear, many soldiers turn and run. This just makes the bears even more eager to tear into them.

GNOME WOODWALKERS

Gnomes? What are they going to do, polish my boots?

Last words of Sir Kemper, Knight of the Blue Tower

Gnomes are cousins to dwarves and the two races have been allies for countless generations. Gnomes are even shorter than dwarves, and slighter of build. They live in the sort of wooded hill country that is often adjacent to dwarf-controlled mountains, in settlements that are cunningly disguised and difficult to locate. All gnomes can create magical glamours to some degree, and this is what makes the woodwalkers dangerous. They are gnomes who specialize in hit and run tactics and whose magical camouflage makes their ambushes nigh undetectable. As their name indicates, woodwalkers are most adept in the forest, but they can and do operate in other terrain. Hidden by their glamours, they await the foe. When enemy troops are fully enmeshed in the trap, the woodwalkers let loose with crossbows. When the enemy organizes itself enough to be a threat, they melt back into the forest and set up again in a different spot. Pursuing these deadly phantoms has driven more than one commander mad with frustration.

When working with dwarves, woodwalkers adjust their tactics to take into account their cousins' less stealthy nature (rangers excepted). Oftentimes, the dwarves will set up supporting units of spearmen and crossbowmen in a good defensive position while the gnomes seek out the enemy. The woodwalkers use their ambush tactics, but allow themselves to be seen enough to encourage pursuit. They then draw the enemy onto the dwarf battle line, where their cousins can deal a telling blow to the disorganized foe.

GNOME GLAMOUR-CRAFTERS

The history books are silent on the gnome contribution to the great dwarven victory at Gellibad, and that is as it should be.

Yelena, Gnome Glamour-crafter

While all gnomes have some ability with magic, the glamour-crafters are masters of the art. They are not individual wizards, striding across the battlefield throwing bolts of mystic energy, but small teams of two to four gnomes who do their best never to be seen at all. They use their glamours to deceive and wrong foot enemy commanders and troops. Their simplest magic can conceal allied troops or create phantom sounds to panic the enemy. More difficult are outright illusions. Skilled glamour-crafters can make it seem that there are troops where none exist, or make numbers appear much larger than they actually are. Those with experience fighting gnomes know the glamour-crafters can be maddening. Enemy commanders may send out hunters or magical beasts to find and neutralize the glamour-crafters if they have the resources. The dwarves, for their part, prize the glamour-crafters above all other allies. They allow for tactics beyond the ability of typical dwarf armies.

WAR WAGONS

We charged the laager three times but we couldn't crack it. Crossbow bolts were flying everywhere and those little bastards were almost impossible to hit inside the wagons. It took us months to recover from that attack.

Sergeant Minyas, The Azure Company

While orc hordes are known for their speed, dwarf war hosts are notorious for their slow advance. It is an infantry-based force and one with a short stride at that. Carts loaded with supplies and ammunition do not help matters any. Slow movement has been a problem for dwarf tacticians for ages. Eventually inspiration struck one of these worthies. Why not turn a weakness into a strength? This is how the dwarf war wagon was born.

The war wagon is in essence a mobile strong point, providing the troops lodged inside it both protection and elevation. They give dwarves a way to deal with heavy cavalry and similar troops. The simplest war wagons are little different from large transports, with troops fighting over the sides. Dwarf engineers have spent decades perfecting war wagons, however, so they are typically much more advanced. There are two main types: crossbow bastions and spear bastions.

A crossbow bastion is designed for the protection of missile troops. Usually one side has a tall mantlet with firing slits cut into it, while the other has a ramp that can be dropped for the easy access of troops. Once it is deployed, crossbowmen occupy it and can shoot from the slits with almost total protection. A spear bastion is similar, but instead of firing slits it has a wooden battlement that dwarves with long spears can fight behind. Both types of war wagon include baskets full of stones to keep them balanced. These can also be thrown at enemies when they get too close.

One war wagon is a curiosity but a dozen or more can make a fortress. War hosts on the march create such a laager each night, and this is the basis of the camp's defenses. In the open a laager is usually circular, but when terrain permits they can be used to create a single battle line instead. If time allows the dwarves use heavy chains through the wheels to link all the wagons together. This prevents individual wagons from being overturned during the battle and creating an opening.

While war wagons were created with defense in mind, they have on occasion been used in an offensive role. This works best when the dwarves are deployed on a hill. On a signal from the commander, spear bastions (sans draft animals) are pushed down the hill towards advancing enemy troops. It is a rough ride that ends when the wagons crash into the enemy and tear great holes in their lines. The spearmen then emerge from the wagons to attack the stunned survivors, followed up by more infantry from the hill. It is a dangerous tactic that can end in disaster, but it can be a shock to an enemy expecting a staid dwarf defense.

WAR MACHINES

The battle turned into a rout when a catapult stone landed on the elf general while he was conferring with his senior commanders. It's hard to fight a battle when your leadership has been turned into a red paste right in front of you.

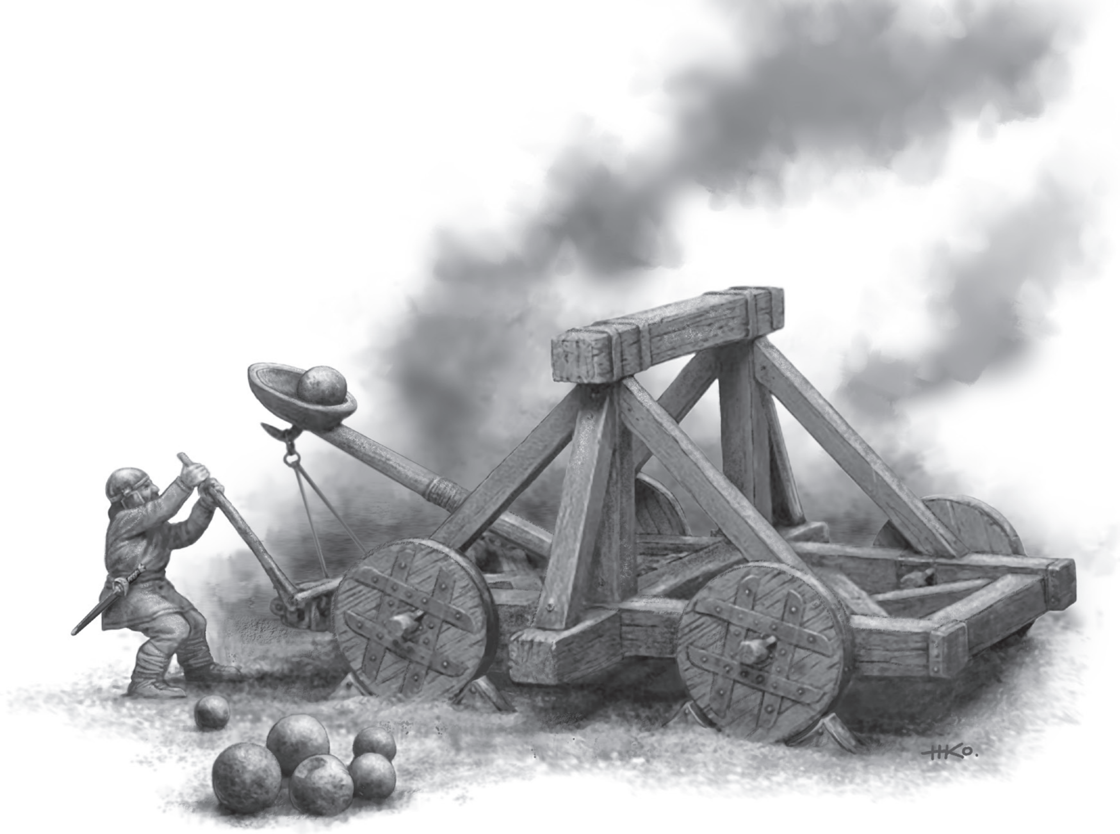
Eklund, Dwarf Chronicler

There is no race as skilled in the design, construction, and use of war machines as the dwarves. The crafting of devices is a dwarf specialty after all, and deadly machines suit their style of warfare. One must be measured and methodical to use war machines effectively and these are apt descriptions of the dwarf race. They also like to strike with overwhelming force when they do attack, and this is certainly what a skillfully used war machine can do.

The most common dwarf war machines are stone throwers and ballistas. Stone throwers include a variety of devices that hurl large boulders at the enemy. These include catapults and trebuchets, and some more experimental machines. In basic design they are similar to what orcs use, but it is wise never to say this to a dwarf. Orc war weapons are shoddy pieces of junk compared to the precision-crafted war machines of the dwarves.

Ballistas are, in essence, giant crossbows that fire spears at the enemy ranks. Once dwarf engineers figured out how to construct repeating crossbows, it was only a matter of time before they applied that technology to ballistas. This was perfected centuries ago and now dwarven repeating ballistas are widely feared. A battery of them can throw a huge weight of fire at an enemy formation, and the spears are propelled with such force that they can skewer several foes and punch through most armor. While an undisciplined crew could shoot off all the available ammunition in short order, the dwarves are not so hasty. They consider where and when the force of the repeating ballista is best applied.

Stone throwers and ballistas are large machines that are slow to move and position. The grenade thrower is smaller and more easily portable, so it has



become a common addition to dwarf war hosts. It uses a simple counterweight mechanism (similar to a trebuchet but on a much smaller scale) to lob grenades much farther than they can be thrown. While a single grenade is not nearly as destructive as a boulder from a catapult, a grenade thrower has a much faster rate of fire. Since they can be moved about with relative ease, they can be redeployed to meet threats as they emerge. Grenade throwers are sometimes mounted on to war wagons as well.

HUMAN ALLIES

It was a day of blood and madness, but it's the horns I'll never forget. When the Knights of the Silver Shield took the field, their horns blowing wildly, our hope of victory was renewed. They thundered across the field and like one great silver lance pierced the dark heart of the enemy army.

Halvar, Dwarf Captain

Of the major races, it is humans that dwarves get along best with. Indeed dwarves live and work in many human cities, where their crafting abilities are highly prized. It is thus not surprising that dwarves and humans often ally in times of war. Economically speaking, human farms provide food for the dwarf city-states, and dwarf workshops provide arms for human forces.

Militarily speaking, the two armies complement each other quite well. Each army is strong on its own, but together they are stronger.

What dwarves most prize from their human allies is cavalry. Some dwarf city-states have bear cavalry, which is fearsome enough but small in number. Human cavalry helps offset the dwarves' major weakness: their slowness of maneuver. Light cavalry provides a scouting and skirmishing force much faster than dwarf rangers, and perfect to harry fleeing troops. Heavy cavalry provides a shock attack force with mobility, and one that can more quickly turn a breaking unit into a routing one. Dwarf commanders also find favor with the light infantry human allies can provide. Fast moving skirmishers with slings or javelins are useful while the dwarf battle line is deploying. Great scouting capability is also appreciated.

Of course, not all city-states have a nearby human ally and even those that do cannot rely on them on every occasion. This leads some city-states to hire human mercenary companies in times of crisis. Not all dwarf leaders are willing to do this. Many consider it a point of pride to have volunteer soldiers only in the war host. Others would rather deploy an asset they do have – gold – to ensure that their war host is as strong as it can be. As always when dealing with mercenary companies, there are risks. Some fight poorly, unwilling to sacrifice their lives for someone else's cause. Others take the gold and run, though stories of dwarves exacting their vengeance on such thieves are legendary. Dwarves appreciate a quality product, though, and that includes mercenaries. Companies that are well trained and professional can expect lucrative contracts and repeat work.

DWARF STRATEGIES AND TACTICS

The dwarves have spent ages studying war. In their Battle Academies there are vigorous debates about engagements that happened 2,000 years ago. Should General Gord have counter-attacked at the Battle of the Pillars instead of withdrawing to his defenses? Would the outcome of the Battle of Sven's Point have been different if a stray arrow hadn't killed Captain Dagrun in its opening moments? Was the Battle of the Bloody Slopes really lost because of human treachery or is that a convenient excuse to cover the incompetence of General Brander? These questions and many more are discussed endlessly but the debates are more than academic. They provide an important part of the education of the next generation of dwarf strategists and tacticians. This chapter seeks to impart some of that knowledge to the reader. It discusses the general nature of dwarf strategies and then some specific tactics common to different types of warfare.

DWARF STRATEGIES

Dwarves have two overwhelming strategic imperatives: to win wars quickly and to do so with the minimum possible casualties. While dwarves excel at warfare, they do not – unlike the orcs – want to do it all the time. The populations of dwarf city-states are not large and cannot be replenished quickly. Lengthy campaigns are thus not in their favor. Nor are battles of attrition. They simply do not have the reserves for that kind of warfare.

The other implication of the dwarves' limited numbers is that they are not an expansionistic race. They rarely seek to conquer territory for its own sake. Usually dwarf war hosts are defending their own lands, avenging an insult, or supporting an ally when they march to war. Occupying territory requires long term use of too many troops to be practical (and dwarves are nothing if not practical).

Bearing in mind these concerns, then, dwarf strategists try to plan short offensive campaigns that end in a single knockout blow. Usually this means finding the enemy's main field army and crushing it so decisively that the war ends. It can also mean sacking the enemy's capital city or main fortress if their field army will not come out and fight. The limitation in these sorts of campaigns is the slow rate of march of a dwarf war host. Defeated enemy armies can often slip away from them to fight again another day. It requires superior tactics for a dwarf army to defeat such an army in detail.

In defense dwarf strategies are simpler. They can rely on their stout fortifications and the fact that they'll be falling back on their own supply line. Their aim in every engagement is to punish the enemy with casualties they cannot sustain. The further an enemy army advances into dwarf territory, the costlier the attacks should become. The hope is that they give up before the city-state itself falls under siege. Certainly there are much softer targets than a dwarf city-state on war footing, and would-be conquerors are encouraged to go find them.

FIELD BATTLE TACTICS

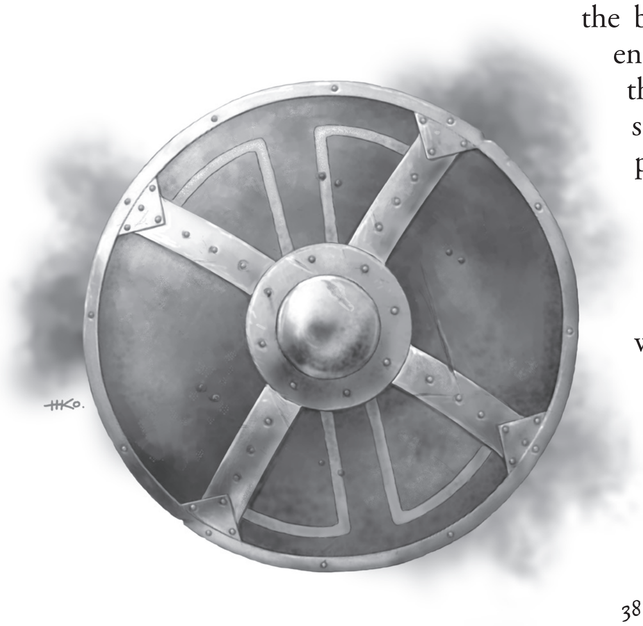
Not every enemy army is obliging enough to destroy itself attacking dwarf defenses. Sometimes foes must be sought out and defeated in a field battle. Some common dwarf tactics for this kind of engagement follow.

Shield Wall

Dwarves of Vallador, remember that you are the stone
and you will not be moved!

Githa, Dwarf Captain

The most basic dwarf tactic is the shield wall. The heavy infantry forms up shoulder to shoulder with overlapping shields, creating one continuous line of defense. It then advances and attempts to roll over the enemy. When the battle lines meet, a pushing match ensues and spears stab out at the foe. If the enemy breaks, the shield wall surges forward. If the shield wall is pierced, the entire battle line is in danger. Reserves – shock troops if available – counter-attack in and try to beat back the enemy. If this cannot be done, the whole shield wall is compromised and things can fall apart quickly.



Shield walls are vulnerable to attacks from the rear, so they are best used in terrain that prevents the enemy from performing flanking maneuvers. They have been used time and again in the mountain passes that lead to dwarf city-states and are formidable in that environment. Shield walls can also be enhanced with the deployment of supporting missile troops, such as crossbowmen and grenadiers. Some generals establish a first line of crossbowmen and have the shield wall form up behind them. The crossbowmen shoot the advancing enemy and then retreat. Dwarf units are trained to open up temporary gaps in the shield wall to let the missile troops through.

THE KILLING FIELD

There, you see, the cowardly dwarves are retreating. Tell every commander to pursue now. They won't escape us!

Erkin, Warlord of the Seven Cities (deceased)

Dwarf generals always want to choose the ground they are going to fight on but this tactic takes that idea to the next level. The war host splits into two parts, a vanguard and a rearguard. The vanguard advances and tries to find the main enemy force. Meanwhile the rearguard prepares defenses on the ground the general has chosen for the engagement. Depending on the terrain, these defenses can include concealed trenches and pits, various obstructions, and hidden war machines.

Once the vanguard finds the enemy army, its job is to goad that force into action. They want to get the enemy's attention and then begin falling back. The vanguard's position is tricky because they don't want to bring on a general engagement too soon. They want to maneuver until the enemy army follows them onto to the prepared killing field. There the ambush can be sprung.

If all goes well, the enemy army walks right into the trap. This should reduce or eliminate its advantages. Cavalry can be lured into boggy ground or other dangerous terrain. Hidden pits or other obstructions can disrupt enemy battle lines. And all the while war machines can do their deadly work. If all goes to plan, a blocking force can outflank the enemy and pen them in. Then the killing field earns its name.

Wagon Fortress

The orcs kept coming but they could not break the laager. At the end of the battle, there were piles of orc corpses four feet high in front of the war wagons.

Ingerid, Dwarf Brigade-Captain

As discussed in the previous chapter, dwarf war hosts frequently include war wagons. Basically, this lets dwarves on the march make their own mobile fortresses. When the war host is on the attack, the war wagons are kept in the rear to defend the supply wagons, wounded, and non-combatants. If a defensive battle is to be fought, the war wagons come into their own. They can be arranged in a circular laager or a single line depending on the terrain. The wagons are then chained together to create a formidable line of defense. The war host deploys in and behind the wagon fortress.

The trick, of course, is getting the enemy to attack a strong position. When facing an aggressive army like an orc horde, this is easy enough. Orcs need little encouragement to attack! Against savvier foes, dwarf generals try to position the wagon fortresses so they must be dealt with. Parking a war wagon laager on a vital crossroads, for example, is not something an enemy general can ignore. Blocking a river crossing or mountain pass can also be effective.

Similar tactics can be used even if the army does not include war wagons. If sappers have the time, they can build walls and bastions, creating defensive works of surprising strength in a matter of days. Such temporary fortifications are useful, though they lack the mobility of the war wagons.

Bombardment

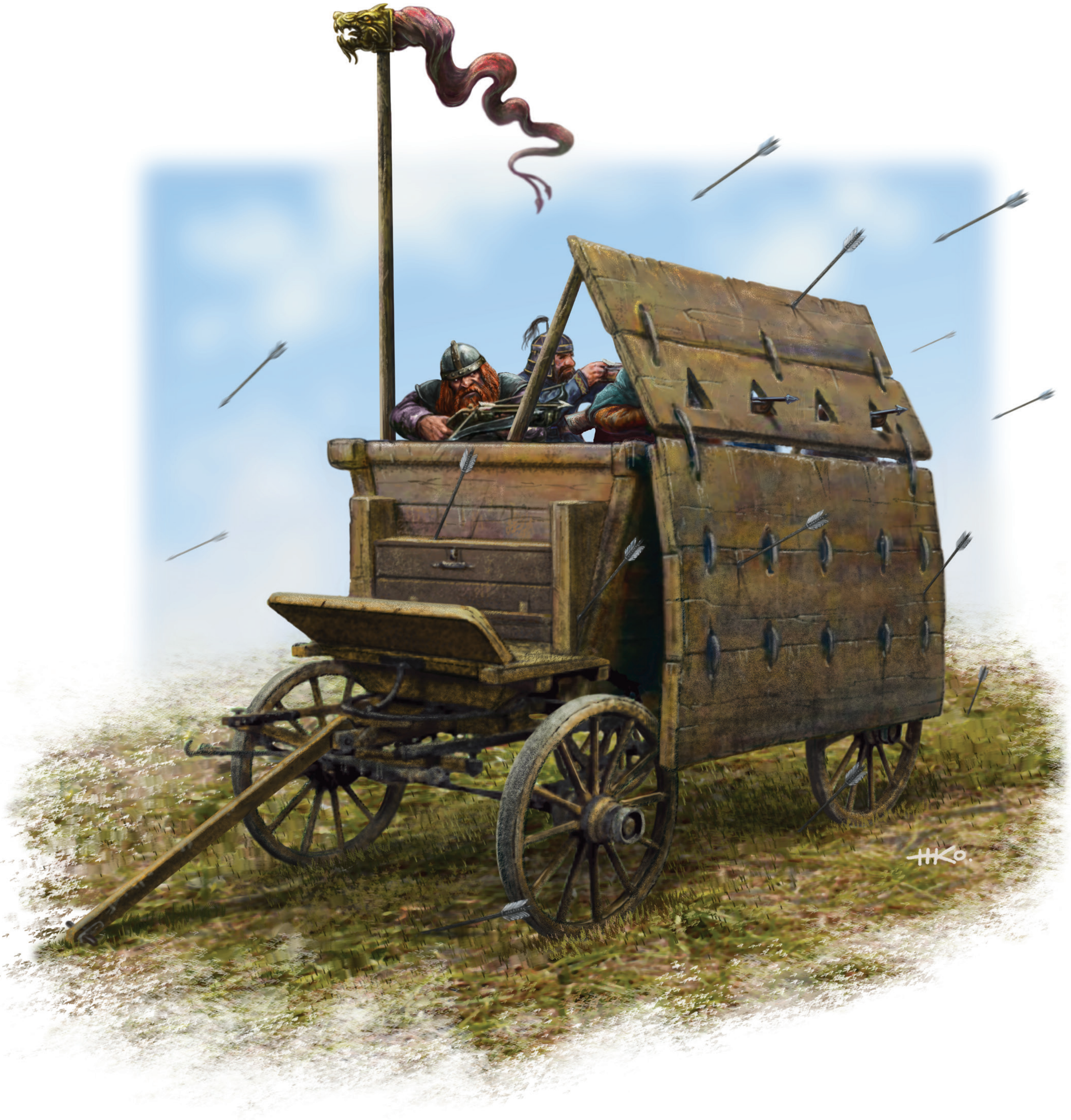
Their war machines are no match for knightly valor. Charge!

Last words of Knight-Commander Damir

War machines take time to emplace, so they are not of much use in battles of maneuver. A battle can be over by the time a stone thrower is ready to shoot for the first time. Given proper time to prepare, however, war machines can be devastating in a field battle.

Choosing the ground for this type of engagement is critical. The war machines and missile troops need a clear field of fire and must be protected from flanking maneuvers. If suitable terrain can be found, the war host can be deployed with stone throwers to the rear and repeating ballistas and crossbowmen to the front. If they have time, the crews can test fire the weapons and have sappers put up range markers on the field. These ensure the crews do not shoot until the enemy is in effective range. Savvy enemies have their skirmishers tear down these markers but many are ignorant of their purpose and let them stand.

When the enemy approach, the stone throwers begin firing first. They aim for the tightest concentrations of enemy troops, so they can inflict maximum casualties. Then the repeating ballistas open up, adding their punishment to the mayhem of falling boulders. As the battle lines close, the crossbowmen and grenade throwers bring their weight of fire to bear as well. For many enemy formations, this deluge of missiles is enough and they retreat. Those that stick it out must face formed dwarf infantry, which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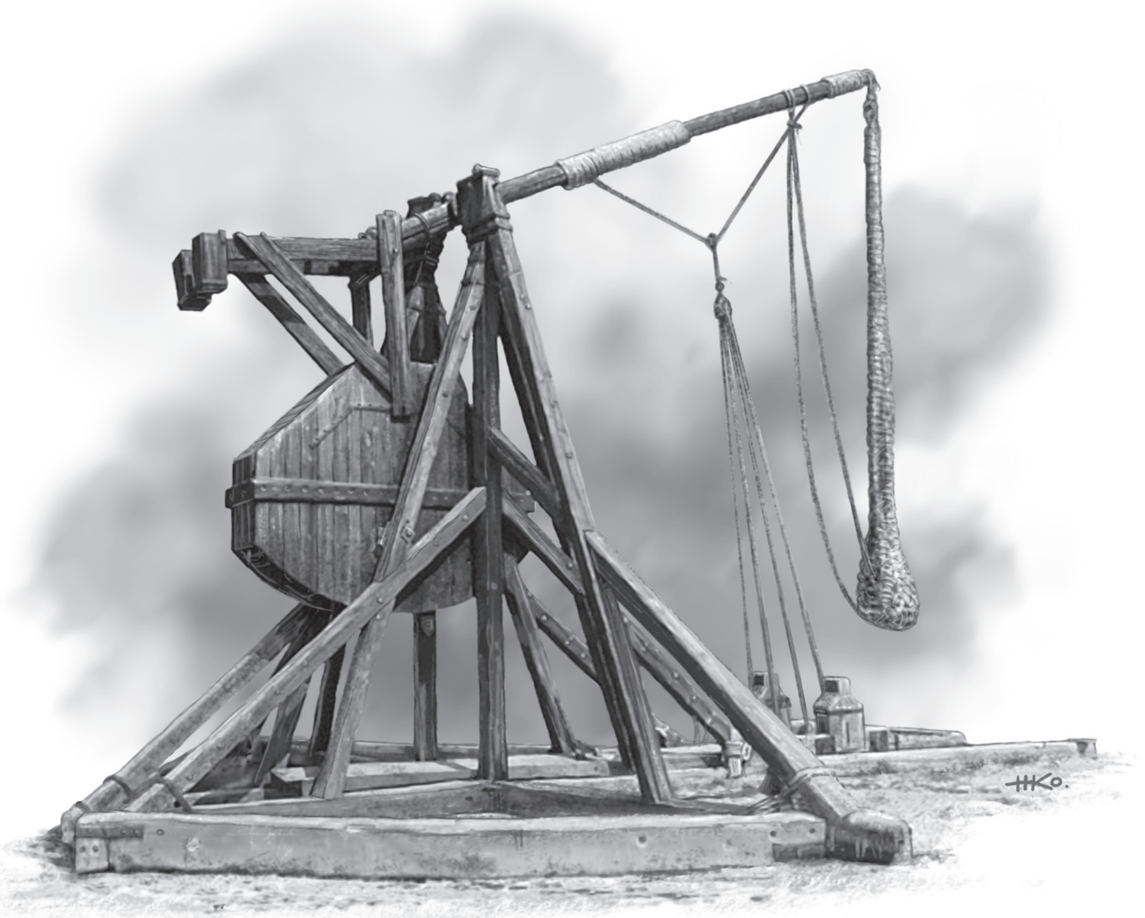
advances when the general judges the bombardment to have disrupted the enemy battle sufficiently.

A bombardment strategy works well when the strategy is simply to deflect the enemy. It is less effective when the goal is the outright destruction of the enemy army. Lacking an exploitation force like cavalry, the war hosts must rely on their infantry to carry the battle. Many enemies simply disengage in the face of a devastating bombardment and re-group to fight another day.

WARFARE TACTICS

While a war host arrayed on an open field is an inspiring sight, dwarves fight more battles deep beneath the earth. Since most dwarf settlements are underground, this only makes sense. Fighting in tunnels and galleries is quite a different affair and requires specialized tactics. The dwarves, so often called upon to defend their city-states from invaders, are long practiced in underground warfare.



Tunnel Fighting

Take extra grenades. There are a lot of them!

Torm, Dwarf Sergeant

Beneath the mountains there is a vast array of tunnels that connect the various dwarf fortresses and settlements. The major cities are rarely directly attacked but there is frequent warfare in the tunnel system. This mostly takes the form of raids from mountain orcs, troglodytes, and other underground threats. They break into the tunnel system and attack trade caravans, or gather their forces for an attack on a small settlement.

Large units like brigades are too unwieldy for this type of fighting, so the dwarves have developed specialized companies to deal with it. These tunnel fighters are a mix of troop types who train together in underground warfare. A typical company is a mix of heavy infantry, shock troops, crossbowmen, and grenadiers, and sometimes sappers are attached for specific missions. These companies work closely with the rangers, who provide constant scouting reports from across the tunnel system. Typically, it is the rangers who detect the incursion and then summon the nearest company of tunnel fighters to deal with it.

The dwarves' knowledge of the tunnel system is their greatest asset in this fighting. To intruders there seems little room to maneuver but not to the dwarves. They can establish a blocking force of heavy infantry in one tunnel, and then send shock troops on a flanking maneuver through others. Many sections of tunnel are hidden behind secret doors, so shock troopers with fearsome two-handed weapons can suddenly appear as if from nowhere. The goal of the company is to hem the enemy in and then crush them. The deafening blasts of grenades disorient the enemy before the final attack goes in.

Gallery Defense

They've got trolls! Shock troops to the gate!

Raimo, Dwarf Captain

When creating the tunnel system, the dwarf architects designed larger galleries to act as choke points and provide bigger defensive formations a place to deploy and fight. Usually several tunnels converge on the galleries, but only one leads back towards the city. Invading enemies who want to get to the city must pass through several of these galleries and they were designed with defense in mind. When a threat is too large for a company of tunnel fighters to deal with, a brigade is deployed to the nearest gallery to bolster its inherent defenses.

A typical gallery is divided by a stone wall and gatehouse that protects the tunnel to the city. Crossbowmen and heavy infantry can be deployed in the towers and battlements. Larger galleries may have repeating ballistas on the towers. Grenade throwers are often mounted on the walls as well, and enjoy increased range when fired from this elevation. The basic tactics are simple enough. Hold the wall and inflict as much damage on the enemy as possible. The towers and other outbuildings are well supplied, with ample food and ammunition. A gallery wall can hold for many days without assistance in most cases.

Behind the main line of defense there is usually a secondary line of barricades. Should there be a breakthrough, dwarf forces can regroup there and keep fighting. The tunnel itself has another sizeable gate. It is open most of the time, as the wall gate is used to control traffic. Dwarf defenders know that if the tunnel gate closes, those remaining in the gallery must win or die. Those in charge of the gate will not open it if the enemy is close, as it is simply too dangerous.

In times of peace, the galleries have a modest garrison that is responsible for checking all those who pass to and from the city. With the fortifications at their command, this force is strong enough to hold the gallery and summon reserves in the case of a surprise attack. In times of war, these garrisons are increased markedly, usually with the deployment of a full brigade if available. If the army is stretched thin, workers' militias are often sent to the galleries to bolster their defenses.

Demolition

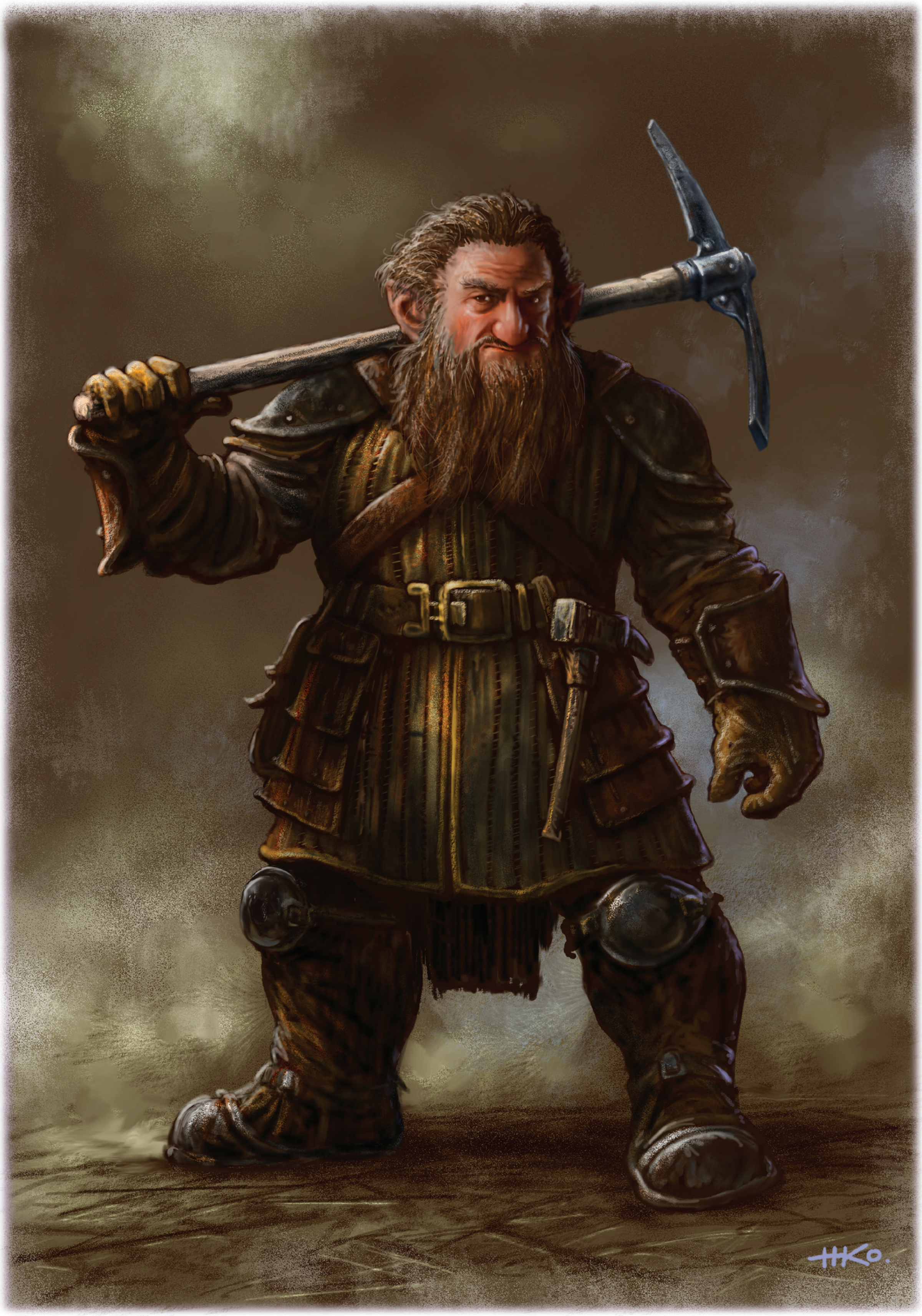
The counter-mine should make contact within an hour.
Assemble the raiding party.

Thorsen, Dwarf Sapper

Invading enemies know or in any case soon find out that the galleries are difficult positions to crack. Mountain orcs and troglodytes are both skilled tunnelers, so they sometimes attempt to circumvent the galleries through mining operations. It is the job of the dwarf sappers to detect and neutralize these threats.

Digging tunnels is a noisy operation, so when any work approaches dwarf defenses it is obvious to the ears. Knowing that mining is happening in a general area and actually finding the tunnel are two different things, however. Sound travels a long way underground and it is easy to miscalculate where the enemy is working.

Dwarves use two different tactics when faced with an enemy mining operation. The first is the deployment of the rangers behind enemy lines. With their knowledge of the tunnel system, rangers can usually slip past enemy pickets and scout for the location of the new tunnels. If they can find the operation, they can lead back a raiding party of shock troops and sappers to fight their way in and then collapse the works.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The second tactic is counter mining, where the sappers start to dig their own tunnel and try to find that of the enemy. If they can do so, they attack the enemy miners and fight a vicious combat in close quarters. If victorious, they use blasting powder to collapse the tunnel. Should the sappers fail, however, there is now an open tunnel back to their own lines. This is usually pre-set with blasting powder, and will be blown if the enemy approaches. The sappers know this is a death sentence for any still in the tunnel below.

Sappers also sometimes use their skills offensively. They can rig tunnels with blasting powder and set it off once enemy troops advance into them. They hate to destroy dwarf craftsmanship in this way, but will do it if the situation is dire. They can also make less destructive traps, like concealed pits and rock falls.

SIEGE TACTICS

Dwarves are the foremost practitioners of siege warfare. Their methodical approach to war and their technical expertise make them ideally suited for this type of operation. While they excel at sieges and certainly the sappers enjoy the challenge, they do take time and that is usually not in their favor. On the other hand, sieges produce far fewer casualties than field battles, so there is a temptation there for dwarf strategists.

Reduction

If we can keep the relief force away for another week, the fortress will be ours.

Hagbart, Dwarf Strategist

The favored tactic of dwarf engineers is reduction. The enemy fortress or city is invested and siege works built. Typically, this is a line of trenches to start with that is gradually built up with ramparts and bastions. Their purpose is to bottle up the enemy inside their own works. Meanwhile, the war machines are emplaced behind the siege line and the stone throwers go to work. They begin hurling boulders at the enemy fortifications, looking to bring down a section of wall through which an attack could be launched.

The best result for the dwarves is a surrender before it comes to an actual attack, either because the garrison is starving or because it realizes that there is no rescue coming. A well-prepared fortress will have stores laid in, however, so the "starve them out" tactic may take much more time than the dwarves want to spend. The dwarves must be mindful of enemy forces coming to lift the siege, and the possibility that they could be cut off from their own supply line.

While some armies – orcs for example – will risk an escalade in the hopes of a quick victory, that is not the dwarf way. Simply charging at a well-defended wall with siege ladders is bound to lead to heavy casualties, and those are always to be avoided in the eyes of dwarf strategists. If time or other tactical concerns mean the dwarves must attack, they at least want to reduce the fortress's defenses first. If the stone throwers can bring down a wall or tower, victory becomes much more likely.

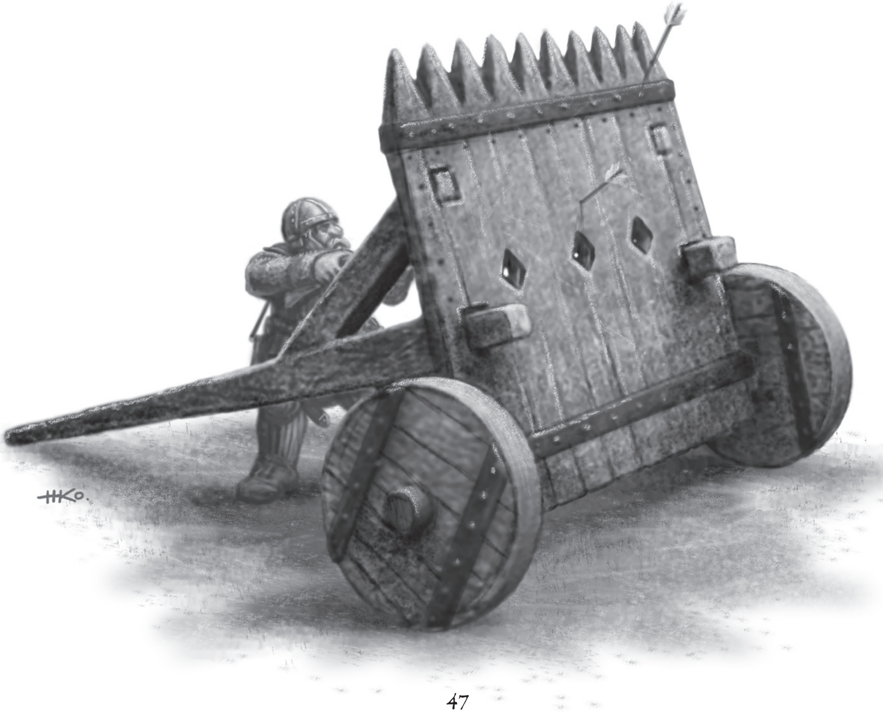
Mining

One minute the curtain wall was there. The next it was dust.

Rybak, Human Soldier

Lobbing boulders is not the only way to bring down a wall, of course. Dwarves are expert miners and bring these skills to their siegecraft. The basic plan is to dig a tunnel from the trench works underneath the enemy walls. Many races use this same tactic, and then burn the wooden supports in the tunnel to effect a collapse of the wall above. The dwarves have a great advantage in their mining operations: blasting powder. Instead of burning the supports, they stuff the end of the mine with barrels of blasting powder and then light a slow burning match. When the powder explodes – often spectacularly – the walls come tumbling down.

When the mine is ready to be blown, the dwarves form a storming party. This is usually a vanguard of shock troops backed up with heavy infantry and grenadiers. Their job is to attack the fortress once the dust has settled. Timing the attack is critical. Too soon after the explosion and they risk being injured by falling debris and other hazards. Too late and the



enemy may recover from the shock and send reserves to the fallen wall. If the storming party is successful, more troops can be fed into the fortress to expand upon this foothold. If they can seize the front gate and open it, victory is all but assured.

Destruction

We remember the massacre at Blackpool. Make their city burn!

Tolegen, Dwarf General

As has been noted, dwarves rarely go to war to seize territory. They may have strategic reasons for attacking a fortress or city, but it is often the case that they have no plans to keep what they conquer. This being the case, it makes little sense to waste time and dwarf lives capturing something they ultimately have little use for. It is also sometimes the case that what the dwarves want to inflict is punishment, usually to avenge the wrong that started the war in the first place. In these cases, dwarf generals demand something different from their engineers: destruction.

The goal here is to raze the fortress and kill its defenders. This begins much like a reduction operation with the construction of siege lines. However, there will be no slow chipping away at the walls. Instead, the stone throwers will throw barrels of burning pitch over the walls to set the fortress alight. Ballistas can also be rigged to hurl incendiaries. They don't have the impact of a barrel of pitch, but the ballistas can fire much faster than the stone throwers. The idea is to light many fires all over and overwhelm the defenders' ability to deal with them. If the fire reaches a certain intensity, then it's only a matter of time.

Defenders who try to escape the inferno may be captured or killed by the besiegers depending on orders of the general and the mood of the soldiers. If vengeance motivated this attack in the first place, fleeing soldiers can expect little mercy from the dwarves.

The dwarves may march away while the ruins still smolder, their primary mission fulfilled. Sometimes though, the demand is that the destruction be made complete. In these cases, they wait until the fires burn themselves out. Then the sappers move into the ruins and finish the job. They knock down all the walls and remaining buildings. They make sure the fortress is nothing but a pile of rubble that cannot be re-occupied without enormous effort. This is a particularly brutal way to make war, but sometimes it is the only way for the dwarves to send a message to their enemies that they will understand.

DWARF VICTORIES

The history of dwarf warfare is as old as the mountains. They have fought through all the ages of history against a long list of powerful foes. They have not won every engagement but they have survived generation after generation. A full history of dwarf battles would take many volumes and is beyond the scope of this work. Instead this chapter provides an overview of some famous dwarf victories. These battles show dwarf arms in action and provide some examples of how war hosts fight.

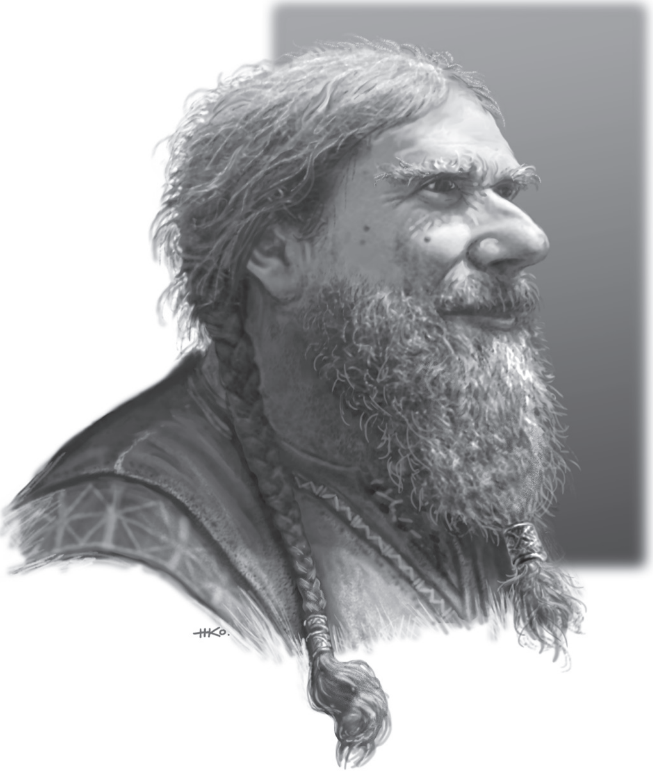
BATTLE OF THE TROG'S LAMENT

Captain Githa of the City-State of Vallador was leading a patrol of the tunnel system when a ranger came upon them. He said he had run into troglodytes in the tunnels. He had killed a few and pushed on, but suspected there were more. Githa dispatched a runner to summon the rest of her company of tunnel fighters, and a section of sappers who were in the area doing some repair work. While she waited for them to appear, Githa sent out scouts to find out more about the troglodyte incursion.

The news was not encouraging. There were hundreds of troglodytes in the tunnel system at least. The dwarves did not know this at the time, but the attack had come about as a result of their own actions. A dwarf mining crew had used too much blasting powder when making a new tunnel. The aftershocks of the explosion had caused a ceiling collapse in a nearby troglodyte settlement. This had killed many adults but also hundreds of fertilized eggs. The troglodytes, who had until that point been content to ignore the dwarves, were now furious at their neighbors. They wanted retribution and they had broken into the tunnel system to get it.

None of this was evident to Captain Githa at that moment. She only knew that the previously sedate trogs were on the march and they were heading towards Vallador. The troglodytes outnumbered the tunnel fighters many times over but they were in territory the dwarves knew well. Captain Githa knew she'd have to make the most of this advantage.

Githa sent the sappers back to their work site to make preparations. Then she tried to channel the troglodytes in that direction. She did this by having her crossbowmen and grenadiers move into a secret tunnel that



connected up with one of the galleries the trogs were mustering in. Unbeknownst to the troglodytes, there were concealed slits in the walls of the gallery. On a signal from their sergeant, the dwarves in the secret tunnel began to fire their repeating crossbows through these slits. As the gallery descended into bloody confusion, the grenadiers opened up a secret door and lobbed grenades into the room. Explosions tore through the trogs and under this dual assault they fled the gallery. The troglodyte thrust thus shifted to a different tunnel, which was exactly what Captain Githa wanted.

When the troglodytes advanced, they found the tunnel blocked by dwarf heavy infantry with shields locked and spears set. The trogs, hungry for vengeance, charged with their crude clubs held high. The dwarves impaled them on their spears, fighting grimly as the weight of the enemy bore down upon them. When there were enough corpses to make an impediment, the dwarves broke off and retreated. Another section of heavy infantry had set up 50 yards beyond them. The bloodied dwarves passed through their brethren so they could take a breather. The trogs charged the fresh dwarf spearmen, and they too inflicted great casualties on the attackers. Captain Githa kept up these delaying actions until she got word from the sappers that their work was finished. Then she had her musician blast two notes on his horn to signal the retreat.

The dwarves retreated to a cavern that had been damaged in the same mining accident that had enraged the troglodytes. They occupied makeshift barricades on the far end and waited for their foes to advance. The troglodytes swarmed into the cavern, their shaman whipping them into a frenzy. The repeating crossbows of the dwarves went to work, felling many as they came in view. The shaman gathered more and more trogs, wanting to overwhelm the dwarves with a single mad rush. When hundreds had gathered around him, the shaman thrust his staff forward and the trogs charged.

Captain Githa gave her own signal at this moment and a half dozen rangers shot flaming arrows towards the ceiling. The shaman laughed at such ineffectual shooting, but only for a moment. The fire arrows hit sacks of blasting powder that the sappers had suspended among the stalactites. The dwarves hit the ground as explosions blossomed throughout the cavern. Stalactites were blown free, plummeting down onto the troglodytes below. Then the whole ceiling above the trogs gave way, crushing them in their hundreds. The sappers, who had originally come to shore up this cavern to prevent such a collapse, thanked the Worker that they had brought blasting powder "just in case."

When the dust settled, Captain Githa sent her soldiers forward to finish off the survivors. The troglodyte incursion was thus snuffed out before it could harm Vallador. The whole city turned out to honor Captain Githa and her tunnel fighters. She was later promoted to Brigade-Captain and became one of Vallador's most popular commanders.

BATTLE OF MAELSTROM PASS

King Vlandin of the City-State of Zhorshun was a ruthless tyrant who earned the enmity of his own people. He suppressed the guilds in Zhorshun and arrested dwarves who tried to re-establish them as traitors. He squandered the city-state's gold on fruitless military adventures and turned allies into enemies. Vlandin craved the glory that war could bring his name, so he decided to lead a war host to attack the elf Kingdom of Thistlewood. This proved a disaster. Not only did the elves smash Vlandin's war host, but also the dwarves back in Zhorshun rose up in revolt. Only a few Vlandin loyalists remained in the city and they were quickly overcome. When the remnants of the war host came home, they found the gates closed to them. Soldiers were welcome, they were told, but Vlandin must go into exile or face trial for his crimes. When most of the surviving soldiers abandoned him, the ex-king fled and found sanctuary among the human cities to the north.

Some in Zhorshun advocated hiring assassins to take care of Vlandin once and for all, but it was decided that the new ruling Workers' Councils should set a better example. This was a noble impulse but Vlandin was not done with Zhorshun just yet. He had hidden away a substantial amount of gold in human banks and this he now used to assemble a mercenary army to take back "his" city. He knew Zhorshun's military was weak (he had destroyed it after all). He thought a quick strike by his army of human mercenaries could topple the Workers' Councils before they could get established. The mercenaries were enticed by Vlandin's gold and the prospect of looting a dwarf city.

Vlandin's 4,000-strong army was soon on the move and word of this reached Zhorshun quickly. The most experienced of the surviving officers advised the Workers' Councils to simply close the gates and let Vlandin's force wear themselves out on the city's defenses. The feckless mercenaries would soon get bored and leave, they asserted. This was undoubtedly good advice, but it did not match the mood of the city-state. The overthrow of the tyrant had exhilarated the workers and they were full of revolutionary fervor. They wanted to form a workers' militia and march out to defeat Vlandin. This would complete what they had started. Against the advice of the officers, the Workers' Councils ordered the militia to organize and a war host to be formed.

Ossip, a former leader of the Soldiers' Guild, was given command of the war host. He had a core of 500 veteran soldiers and roughly 2,000 dwarves of the workers' militia. Vlandin's army largely consisted of medium infantry, backed up by small units of archers and foot knights. He had little cavalry, because it was expensive to hire and he believed it would be of limited use in attacking the city.

The war host deployed in the Maelstrom Pass (so-called for the storms that whipped through it on a regular basis). Ossip appreciated the spirit of his troops but the soldier in him knew that meeting the mercenaries in the open would be disastrous. He chose the pass because it was narrow and ideal for defense. Here his untested militia could not be flanked. Ossip deployed them in a shield wall across the pass, while sending a smaller force into the hills to look for an old smugglers' path reputed to be in the area.

When the mercenary army arrived, Vlandin was delighted with the scene before him. He had thought he might have to claw his way into Zhorshun. Now the treacherous workers had come out to be slaughtered. It was too perfect. He deployed his medium infantry in the center, his foot knights on the right flank, and his archers on the left. As the battle lines approached, they exchanged missile fire. The dwarves only had two companies of crossbowmen but they were veterans and knew their business. Soon mercenaries were falling to their well-disciplined fire. The human archers replied, and the lighter armor of the workers' militia did little to protect them from the plunging arrows.

Vlandin, eager for victory, ordered the charge and his army surged forward. The battle lines crashed together and for a moment Ossip thought his shield wall would be swept away. The workers' militia held, though, paying a fearful price but maintaining their formation and striking down hundreds of the charging humans. Ossip sent a reserve force of veteran

heavy infantry to counter the foot knights, and a vicious battle ensued on that flank. The dwarf line held but barely. The mercenaries kept up the pressure and their numbers began to tell. Dwarf banners began to fall and the shield wall bowed inward. If it broke, the tyrant would win.

At this moment the pass echoed with blasting war horns. It was Ossip's flanking force, who had found a path through the hills and into the enemy's rear. Now 30 bear cavalry and a full company of shock troops charged into the mercenaries from behind. It was a small force, but it struck like thunder. The bears were quickly among the mercenaries, tearing and clawing. The shock troops swung their two-handed weapons in great arcs, felling the hemmed in humans in great numbers. Panic quickly set in and Vlandin's battle line crumbled. The mercenaries, motivated only by money, would not stand when the battle turned against them. Those that were not cut down by the righteous dwarves fled the field, never to return. As for Vlandin, he was cornered by a militia unit and beaten to death with hammers that had been working forges only days before. The tyrant would threaten Zhorshun no more.

BATTLE OF THE MYSTIC GLADES

One night the orc warlord Kurag had a powerful dream about a great forest. A blessing from the War-Mother, or so his shaman said. In the dream he found a door in a mighty tree that led to a cave full of magical wonders. Small creatures swarmed him but he stomped them bloody and seized a rune-carved axe from the trove. When he emerged, he used the axe to cut down the forest. His shaman said this was a prophecy. If he took his horde to the Forest of Shambuth, he would find his destiny as one of the greatest of all warlords. The forest was far away but Kurag was determined. He would find this rune-axe and the world would fear his name.

When word of the approaching orc horde reached the gnomes of Shambuth, they called up their allies, the dwarves of the City-State of Thoromir. They honored their ancient pacts and sent a war host to the Forest of Shambuth. General Aigran, a well-respected officer with a reputation as a hard fighter, was in command. He had a war council with the gnome commander, Thennlo, and together they made a plan to deal with the rapidly approaching orcs. They did not know why Kurag and his horde had come all this way but they would give them a warm reception.

When the orcs arrived outside the forest, Kurag set up a camp and sent his scouts inside to take a look. The scouts spent the better part of a day investigating the forest, and while they felt like they were being watched, they saw no one. They spied several enormous trees deeper in the forest and dutifully reported this to Kurag. The orc warlord ordered the advance

immediately. The chariots (useless in the forest) were left behind in the camp. The rest of the horde followed Kurag into the Forest of Shambuth.

Almost immediately orcs began to die. Dwarf rangers and gnome woodwalkers were waiting for them, shooting arrows and bolts from well-concealed positions. Kurag beheaded his chief scout on the spot, but this did not improve the situation. Orc skirmishers fanned out in front of the horde, throwing javelins at any sound or movement. A few unlucky dwarves and gnomes were killed, but the galling fire continued to drop orcs. Then, as the warrior infantry advanced, the rangers and woodwalkers disengaged and fell back and the forest was quiet again.

Kurag's new chief scout reported seeing dwarves fleeing towards a glade to the west and the horde followed. When the warrior infantry crashed into the glade, they saw a solitary company of dwarf heavy infantry hastily forming up across the way. There was only one thing for self-respecting orcs to do: charge! The glade echoed with orc battle cries as they sprinted towards the dwarves. A wave of crossbow bolts, seemingly coming from nowhere, slammed into the orcs and tore ragged holes in their ranks. The glade had many more dwarves than it had first appeared. Gnome glamour-crafters had used their magic to conceal three companies of dwarf crossbowmen, who now worked their repeating crossbows furiously to pummel the warrior infantry. They broke the charge of the disoriented orcs, who retreated in disorder. The dwarves and gnomes moved back, leaving a glade full of dead and dying orcs.

The frustrated Kurag sent out his wolf riders to find the dwarves. Rangers and woodwalkers shot some from their saddles. Others fell into concealed pits and were impaled on sharpened stakes. After taking many casualties, the wolf riders found a larger glade further west and here the main dwarf force was deployed. At the back of the glade stood a huge tree, ancient and gnarled. When Kurag heard this news, he knew this was the place. He would crush these dwarves and seize his destiny.

The orc warlord got his stalled advance going again. He sent great clouds of skirmishers ahead to try to ferret out hidden units. He formed up his heavily armored Ironbacks and made them the center of a battle line filled out with warrior infantry. Then the horde advanced into the glade where the dwarf war host waited. General Aigran had formed up with troops in two lines. The first was spear-armed heavy infantry with companies of crossbowmen on the wings. The second was a reserve of shock troops and axe-armed heavy infantry. The dwarf rangers and gnome woodwalkers lurked in the forest around the glade, harassing the orcs with accurate fire.

The orc skirmishers ran ahead, peppering the dwarf line with javelins. They kept the dwarf crossbowmen busy as the main orc battle line moved up. Kurag tried to keep the whole line moving at the pace of the Ironbacks, but the warrior infantry would not be held back. In the center the Ironbacks advanced methodically, but on the flanks the warrior infantry surged ahead. The dwarf crossbowmen fell back to the second line while the shield wall received the orc charge. At last the orcs could get to grips with their foes and they howled with bloodlust. The dwarves were tough and disciplined, the orcs wild and strong. The fight was fierce but without the Ironbacks the dwarves were holding their own.

Kurag marched with the Ironbacks as they approached the clashing battle lines. Suddenly, the sound of great drums split the air. Kurag turned around to see another dwarf force emerging from the trees behind them. The orc warlord was confused. His horde had just come from there. How had the dwarves gotten in his rear? Roaring with frustration, he turned the Ironbacks around and moved them back the way they had come. The new dwarf force waited for them, drums thumping. The rangers and woodwalkers poured fire onto the Ironbacks. They were heavily armored but not impervious to the missiles raining down upon them.

With the Ironbacks gone, the center of the dwarf line was free to support its flanks. They isolated the warrior infantry on the left and right, hemming the orcs in with these reinforcements. These two isolated battles continued for some time but their ultimate result was no longer in doubt. Meanwhile, the second dwarf line advanced up the center after the retreating Ironbacks. Kurag and his elite finally got close to the new dwarf force and charged. It should have been devastating but when the orcs attacked, their foes melted away. There were, in fact, no dwarves there at all. They were an illusion of the gnome glamour-crafters.

The Ironbacks were now completely confused and disorganized. They were also facing the wrong way when the dwarf shock troops slammed into

HKo.

them. The mighty shields of the Ironbacks did them little good, and two-handed axes and hammers brought them low. The leader of the shock troops, Brigade-Captain Ranulf, bore a relic of his family, a great rune-axe that could cut steel like paper. Kurag was trying to rally his troops when he spotted Ranulf and the axe. His dream had not lied. It had brought him and the axe together. He just needed to seize it! There was just one problem: Ranulf. The dwarf swung his rune-axe in a mighty arc and took Kurag's head from his shoulders. The orc warlord had met his destiny sure enough, but it was to give the dwarves and gnomes a great victory over orckind.

BATTLE OF SIGVARD'S PASS

The dwarf City-State of Ragnaheim had long controlled Sigvard's Pass, a strategic route through the Whitecap Mountains. The elf kingdom of Alessia was west of the pass and the human kingdom of Gifford was east of it. Ragnaheim traded with both and it was the city-state's policy to keep the peace if at all possible. In the case of war between Alessia and Gifford, Ragnaheim allowed use of the pass but only for an exorbitant fee. The dwarves looked at it as a payment for the disruption of trade during wartime. For decades Ragnaheim's policies worked and there was peace in the region.

Things changed when Isamay became the queen of Gifford. She thought the years of peace had made her people soft so she pursued belligerent policies that alienated Gifford from its neighbors. At first Isamay focused her military adventures further east, but she soon set her sights on Alessia. She took her army into Sigvard's Pass and when a diplomatic mission from Ragnaheim appeared to try to dissuade her from this course of action (or at the very least, collect the dwarves' fee for use of the pass), Isamay ordered them killed.

Queen Isamay took her army into Alessia but the campaign did not go as she planned. She won the first battle against unprepared forces, but then the elves rallied and defeated the humans soundly in three battles. In the end Isamay had little choice but to take her battered army home. She had thought she'd be able to buy the dwarves of Ragnaheim off with treasure plundered from Alessia but she had none. She marched into Sigvard's Pass nonetheless, hoping the dwarves would let her pass.

If Queen Isamay had simply not paid the fee, they might indeed have let her army pass if it meant an end to hostilities. There was no way that King Arnstein would let the slaughter of his diplomats stand, however. When the human army came to the narrowest section of the pass, they found a war host of 3,000 dwarves waiting for them. King Arnstein was in command, committed to avenging the insult in person. If the humans wanted to make it home, they'd have to come through the dwarves.

King Arnstein deployed a line of war wagons straight across the pass. Their wheels were chained together with mantlets between the wagons to create a solid line of defenses. There were 20 war wagons all together, alternating between crossbow bastions and spear bastions. Four repeating ballistas were emplaced between the war wagons, with three stone throwers behind it. A reserve force of heavy infantry and shock troops waited behind the main line of defense.

Queen Isamay's army was depleted but still outnumbered the dwarves two to one. Her infantry was primarily pikemen, supported by archers and medium cavalry. Her Queen's Guard were a tough unit of food knights armed with war hammers. The elves had destroyed the elite heavy cavalry component of the Queen's Guard in a masterful ambush two weeks earlier.

Isamay opened the battle with hails of arrows from her units of archers. The dwarves on the battle line packed into the war wagons to weather it, and they provided almost complete protection from the plunging arrows. Meanwhile, the crossbow bastions returned fire. There were fewer crossbowmen but they kept up a steady fire at the lightly armored human archers. Queen Isamay had little choice at this point but to send her pike blocks forward.

The humans advanced in impressive order. They were in a tight formation that was designed to repel charging horsemen. When the pikemen crossed a range marker set up before the battle, a horn rang out and the dwarf stone throwers let loose. Three huge boulders arced over the war wagons and crashed into the tightly packed human infantry, tearing bloody holes in their formations. The repeating ballistas also opened up, raking the front lines with devastating effect. The humans were veterans, though, so they re-formed and kept coming. Although they took murderous casualties, their charge against the war wagons crashed home.

The fighting here was new to both sides. The dwarves in the spear bastions were used to having to reach over their opponents, but the pikes were nearly twice as long as their spears. The pikemen were used to fighting in the open and they had no training in how to deal with something like the war wagons. A desperate fight thus ensued, with each side improvising tactics. The dwarves threw rocks and grenades to try to break up the pike formations. The humans first tried stabbing into the bastions and this had some effectiveness. Then they tried to use their pikes to push the war wagons over.

They could not overcome the chains holding the war wagons together, however. After an hour of struggle, the humans retreated. They had succeeded in destroying two of the repeating ballistas and killing or wounding hundreds of dwarves but their own numbers were sorely depleted.

A lull ensued, during which both commanders conferred with their captains and consolidated. When the humans came on again, it was with different tactics. They had flammable materials in what was left of their siege train, so this time the archers shot fire arrows at the war wagons. They concentrated on the four war wagons on the right flank, pouring fire arrows into them. The war wagons had some protection against fire attacks but this concentration proved too much. Soon the wagons were burning and the dwarves had to abandon them. Now the human line advanced, pikemen up the middle and foot knights to the right. They advanced in a loose formation, so when the stone throwers went to work there were not as many casualties.

The pikemen in the center were there to keep the dwarves busy. Meanwhile, the foot knights advanced into the burning wagons and set to them with their war hammers. King Arnstein sent heavy infantry forward to counter-attack and a brutal battle among the burning wagons teetered back and forth. The foot knights finally pushed the dwarves back and created a gap in the line of war wagons. Now Isamay unleashed her cavalry toward the gap. If the cavalry got into the dwarf rear, it would be a disaster for Ragnaheim.

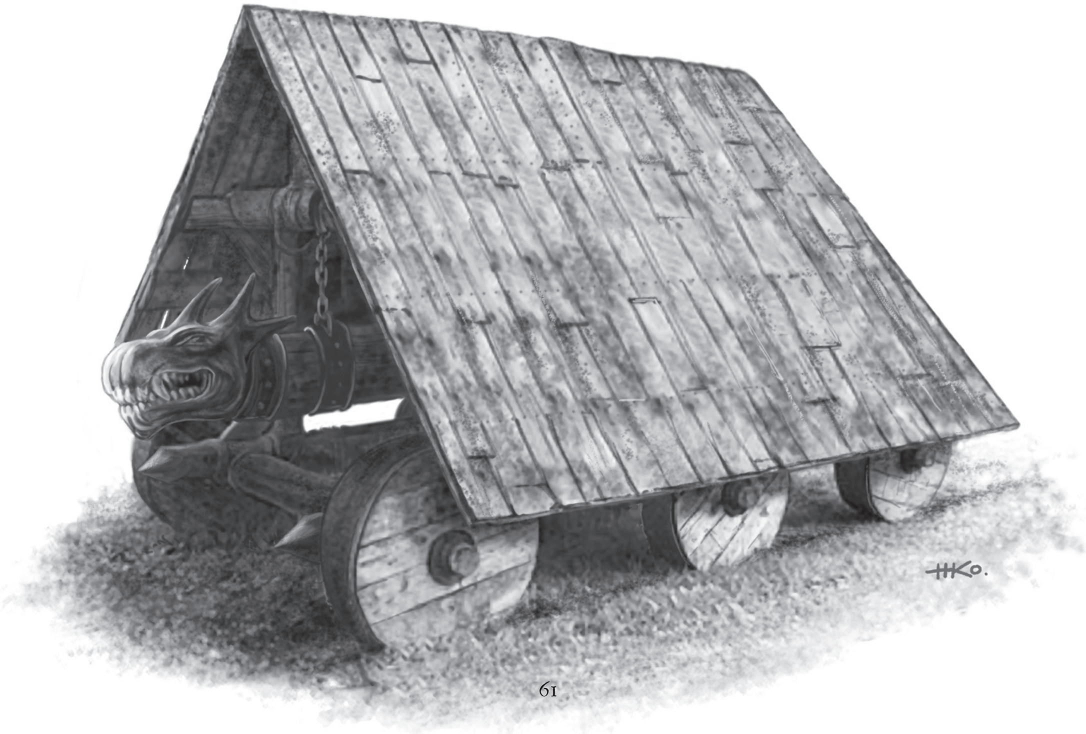
The human horsemen raced towards the hole in the dwarf line. They hugged the wall of the pass, ready to break out as soon as they made it through the gap. Behind the lines the dwarves formed a phalanx of spearmen. They did not, however, plug the hole. The humans soon found out why. On the heights above King Arnstein had deployed dwarf rangers and slingers. They now rained rocks and sling bullets down the cliff side, which impacted with deadly results. Men and horses were crushed, first by rocks and then by their own comrades as they rode on. Bullets crashed into helmets, felling the riders with a clang. The cavalry lost half their number passing through the gap and on the other side they found the dwarf phalanx waiting. This they charged, but the dwarf spear points repelled them. Then the shock troops flanked the milling horsemen, bringing their mounts low with axe and hammer strikes and then finishing the riders. The charge was broken and the horsemen fled back the way they had come.

At this point Queen Isamay knew she was in an untenable position. She was trapped between dwarf and elf armies, and her own force had been soundly beaten. She did not want to throw more lives away, so she surrendered to King Arnstein. She expected the dwarves would have her head, but to her surprise they were most interested in negotiating a peace. Her troops were allowed to go home in small groups. Queen Isamay signed a new treaty with the dwarves and elves. She had to pay heavy reparations but it let her salvage something from this disastrous campaign. Queen Isamay became a notable monarch in later years, but she never forgot the lessons of Sigvard's Pass.

THE SIEGE OF GILTHARION

When Prince Zagbort of Thavadol was a young dwarf, he left his home city and fell in with a group of adventurers. They raided tombs, plundered dungeons, and squandered their hard won riches on any number of ill-advised schemes. One of his companions was an elf named Ellara. One of her distant ancestors – a mage of fearsome reputation – had briefly been the Consul of the city of Giltharion. Ellara convinced her friends to aid her in a coup so she could reclaim what she saw as her family heritage. This failed badly, leading to the imprisonment of Ellara, Zagbort, and the rest of their adventuring party. There the story would have ended if an elf captain had not recognized the prince from a visit to Thavadol.

When Consul Slythen was told the identity of his prisoner, he immediately sent word to Thavadol and demanded an outrageous ransom for the young noble. Zagbort's father, King Mormir, refused. "Return my son or prepare for war," he said. Slythen thought the dwarves were bluffing. He cut off Zagbort's beard and sent it to Thavadol. King Mormir showed the beard to his council and their advice was unanimous: Thavadol would go to war.



King Mormir mustered a war host and marched on Giltharion. Consul Slythen sent out light cavalry raiders to harass the dwarf column. They inflicted a steady stream of casualties on the war host but it advanced steadily. Slythen's generals advised him to take the field and face the dwarves in battle. He decided to keep his army inside the city and wait for the dwarves to come to him. So began the Siege of Giltharion.

Mormir was enraged at the treatment of his son and wanted to attack the city as soon as possible. His officers included Brigade-Captain Dragutin, a noted siege specialist. He advised the king in the strongest terms not to attempt an escalade. "We will get your son back, but we must do it the dwarf way," he said. Mormir was angry but he knew his brigade-captain was right. He gave command of the siege to Dragutin and let the sappers begin their work.

The sappers laid out the siege lines and soon dwarves were digging trenches all around the city. Others took axes to the elven forests to provide lumber for the defensive works and the construction of stone throwers. Units of elf archers sallied out sporadically to harass the sappers but this did nothing to stop the completion of the siege lines. Once Giltharion was bottled up, the stone throwers began their work. Soon huge boulders were crashing into the walls or the city beyond.

Three weeks into the siege Consul Slythen launched a midnight sortie. While foot archers came out to fire on the siege line, a force of light cavalry raced forward. Their swift elven steeds were able to jump the dwarf trenches and get in among the stone throwers. They killed many of the artillerists and set several stone throwers on fire. Then they returned to Giltharion, having suffered only a handful of casualties. Slythen was delighted, King Mormir much less so.

Within a few days all the stone throwers were shooting again. Brigade-Captain Dragutin also began a mining operation against the city. Soon sappers were digging tunnels towards the walls. A shipment of blasting powder arrived from Thavadol and was ready to be deployed once the mines were under the walls. Meanwhile, Dragutin had rangers out every night, taking a close-up look at the city's defenses. They were particularly interested in a small river that pierced the city's south wall. There was a water gate but it seemed in poor repair.

With King Mormir getting increasingly agitated, Dragutin decided to try an attack on the water gate. If it worked, the siege could be over in a matter of hours. Behind the cover of their siege lines, the sappers built 20 assault boats. These Dragutin filled with shock troops, grenadiers, sappers, and a few rangers. An exploitation force of heavy infantry and crossbowmen was readied in the trenches as the boats quietly sailed down the river to the city. The water gate was old and rusted and the hammers of the shock troops soon knocked it down, though this of course alerted the elves to their presence.

The lead boats swept inside the tunnel only to discover a much newer and much stronger gate. Most of the boats were now crammed together under the wall, where the elves were ready with stones of their own to hurl down upon them. Boats were holed and began to sink, and while falling stones killed many dwarves outright, others swam for the shore. Survivors faced bow fire from the walls. The assault on the water gate was a costly failure, though King Mormir did at least appreciate its boldness.

Emboldened by this success, Consul Slythen sent out another sortie the following night. This time Dragutin was ready for him. Behind the ramparts, the dwarves had emplaced thousands of sharpened stakes. This time when light cavalry attempted to jump the trench, their horses impaled themselves on a forest of stakes. The cream of Slythen's light cavalry were killed and he did not try this tactic again.

Two weeks later the mines were under the walls. The sappers packed them with blasting powder and reported that they were ready. Brigade-Captain Dragutin prepared a dawn attack. Once the wall came down, the heavy infantry would surge forward with grenadiers and crossbowmen in support. Once they fought their way inside the city, the shock troops would reinforce them. Repeating ballistas and slingers would try to keep the elves off the parts of the walls that remained intact.

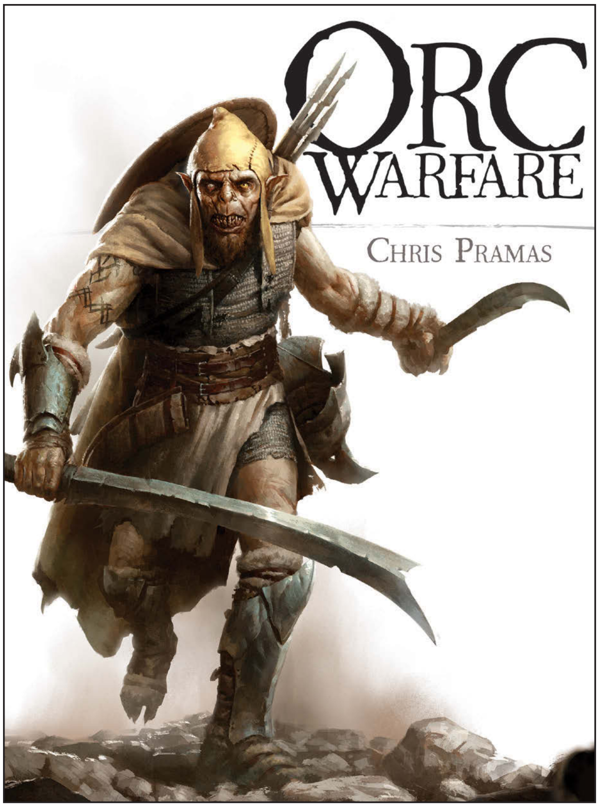
As the sun rose there was an enormous explosion under the west wall of Giltharion. The guards there were simply vaporized. Masonry flew in all directions, collapsing houses and killing hundreds of elven soldiers and citizens. The whole city shook with the force of the blast, making it instantly clear that this was not simply another day of the siege.

Where the west wall had stood there was now a pile of rubble with no defenders. The heavy infantry climbed out of their trenches and advanced. They received some desultory bow fire from the surviving towers but it was ineffectual. The dwarves climbed over the rubble and still faced no resistance. Finally they advanced into a huge square and found elf spearmen formed up with spear points glittering in the morning sun. An elf officer rode forward with a flag of truce. Brigade-Captain Dragutin met him between the two battle lines. The elf told Dragutin that the fighting could stop now. After the wall came down, the elven officers had removed Slythen from office and installed a new consul: Ellara! She had already freed her comrade Zagbort, who would be returned to his father in short order. The Siege of Giltharion was over.

Ellara called a truce and formally returned Prince Zagbort to his people. Some of the dwarves wanted to sack the elf city, but Mormir refused. They had gone to war to get his son back and now they had. The king was reunited with his son, though this proved brief. The prince was still young and soon left Thavadol to continue his adventures. His foolishness never caused another war, however.

AFTERWORD

This concludes our look at *Dwarf Warfare*. This book is a sequel to *Orc Warfare* by the same author. If you have not read that book yet, it provides a useful companion to this one. You can read a similar discussion of the orcs, one of the great foes of the dwarves. Following this book is *Elf Warfare*, which turns its attention to a race that is sometimes an ally and sometimes an enemy of the dwarves. Taken together these books provide an expanding guide to fantasy warfare as practiced by its most popular races.



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